



FANCIFUL
TALES

FRANK R.
STOCKTON



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FANCIFUL TALES



"SO MANY THINGS STOP AT NIGHT—SUCH AS THE DAY ITSELF—THAT I
THINK YOU OUGHT TO PARDON MY POOR CLOCK."

FANCIFUL TALES

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PREFACE

IT is because I have found that children love Stockton's stories, that they appreciate the delicate bits of humor found in them, and enjoy discussing the ethical questions suggested, that I have arranged in this book a few of the favorites, easily read by children from eight to ten years of age.

I believe, also, that children can best learn to read by reading what is best in literature.

This little volume, then, is the result of repeated tests with children of various ability in the reading of Stockton's stories. The results proved that the language is simple and child-like, the thought natural, and the story itself intensely interesting.

Notes and suggestive questions for each story, except "The Christmas Truants," which is so simple that it does not seem to need them, are given at the end of the book. These, it is believed, will be found helpful to the teacher and pupil and aid in securing the best results.

JULIA ELIZABETH LANGWORTHY.

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INTRODUCTION

JOY as a factor in education is too apt to be ignored. Feeling and pleasure are too often counted out as not being related to the needs of the child. Good-natured merriment is hushed. School is invested with a school-consciousness, an insupportable dryness and solemnity which precludes the spontaneous laughter of a normal growth. Discipline is enforced by direct didactic teaching or through sarcasm rather than encouraged by the fun which has no sting in it.

There is no writer before the public who has added more to the wholesome humor of the age than Mr. Stockton—no writer whose stories are so full of pure wit, entirely free from poison, and pointing to healthy, happy action, while probing false sentiment. What child could fail to raise his own standard and guard himself against egotism after following Arla through her trials in attempting to regulate the Clocks of Rondaine? What boy could fail

to appreciate the sweetness and quiet in the character of the Minor Canon?

Every school would be the better for such reading. The notes from the pipes of "Old Pipes" come floating down to me from the happy reading lessons of years ago, when my own pupils loved to read the story. What a happy mood it threw over the school-room! It is the realization of a long hope that one of my pupils has selected this story as one that ought to come into an inexpensive school-book where children in general may enjoy it. And why should not children have such reading, and have it related to school work? Why should the librarian at the public library be the real teacher of reading, the one to whom children go to get what they like and want? Why should the public library instead of the school-room be the literary resort for children? Why should not the children, who form the best part of the "reading public," be in intimate relation to the literary life of their land? Why should they not get at the man who sings out of his heart because he has something to sing? What would it mean to the children of the United States if all the reading-books gotten up for commercial purposes were swept out of existence and the works of good writers substi-

tuted? What would it mean to the public? What, to teachers, authors, publishers? To the child it would mean stores and stores of knowledge, contact with the best life agoing, the conservation of his youth, economy of his time. To the public it would mean a more intelligent citizenship, a happier people, the raising of the general taste. To the teacher it would mean relief from the drudgery of trying to make something seem good and interesting that is often poor and inane. To the author it would mean an audience of thousands where he is now heard by one. To the publisher it would mean the delight of knowing himself to be patriotically related to the public.

Success to the little book, "Fanciful Tales"! May it be followed by companions from the best authors of the country, until there is a complete set of "reading-books," and the literary life of the land is the common condition of people, and our best writers are as well known to the millions as they are now to the few thousands who form the reading public.

MARY E. BURT.

THE VINES, HOLBROOK, L. I.,

July 5, 1894.



A BEAUTIFUL DRYAD STEPPED QUICKLY OUT.

FANCIFUL TALES

OLD PIPES AND THE DRYAD

A MOUNTAIN brook ran through a little village. Over the brook there was a narrow bridge, and from the bridge a foot-path led out from the village and up the hill-side, to the cottage of Old Pipes and his mother.

For many, many years Old Pipes had been employed by the villagers to pipe the cattle down from the hills. Every afternoon, an hour before sunset, he would sit on a rock in front of his cottage and play on his pipes. Then all the flocks and herds that were grazing on the mountains would hear him, wherever they might happen to be, and would come down to the village—the cows by the easiest paths, the sheep by those not quite so easy, and the goats by the steep and rocky ways that were hardest of all.

But now, for a year or more, Old Pipes had not piped the cattle home. It is true that every afternoon he sat upon the rock and played upon his pipes; but the cattle did not

hear him. He had grown old, and his breath was feeble. The echoes of his cheerful notes, which used to come from the rocky hill on the other side of the valley, were heard no more; and twenty yards from Old Pipes one could scarcely tell what tune he was playing. He had become somewhat deaf, and did not know that the sound of his pipes was so thin and weak, and that the cattle did not hear him. The cows, the sheep, and the goats came down every afternoon as before; but this was because two boys and a girl were sent up after them. The villagers did not wish the good old man to know that his piping was no longer of any use; so they paid him his little salary every month, and said nothing about the two boys and the girl.

Old Pipes's mother was, of course, a great deal older than he was, and was as deaf as a gate—posts, latch, hinges, and all—and she never knew that the sound of her son's pipe did not spread over all the mountain-side and echo back strong and clear from the opposite hills. She was very fond of Old Pipes, and proud of his piping; and as he was so much younger than she was, she never thought of him as being very old. She cooked for him, and made his bed, and mended his clothes;

and they lived very comfortably on his little salary.

One afternoon, at the end of the month, when Old Pipes had finished his piping, he took his stout staff and went down the hill to the village to receive the money for his month's work. The path seemed a great deal steeper and more difficult than it used to be; and Old Pipes thought that it must have been washed by the rains and greatly damaged. He remembered it as a path that was quite easy to traverse either up or down. But Old Pipes had been a very active man, and as his mother was so much older than he was, he never thought of himself as aged and infirm.

When the Chief Villager had paid him, and he had talked a little with some of his friends, Old Pipes started to go home. But when he had crossed the bridge over the brook, and gone a short distance up the hill-side, he became very tired, and sat down upon a stone. He had not been sitting there half a minute, when along came two boys and a girl.

"Children," said Old Pipes, "I'm very tired to-night, and I don't believe I can climb up this steep path to my home. I think I shall have to ask you to help me."

"We will do that," said the boys and the

girl, quite cheerfully ; and one boy took him by the right hand and the other by the left, while the girl pushed him in the back. In this way he went up the hill quite easily, and soon reached his cottage door. Old Pipes gave each of the three children a copper coin, and then they sat down for a few minutes' rest before starting back to the village.

"I'm sorry that I tired you so much," said Old Pipes.

"Oh, that would not have tired us," said one of the boys, "if we had not been so far to-day after the cows, the sheep, and the goats. They rambled high up on the mountain, and we never before had such a time in finding them."

"Had to go after the cows, the sheep, and the goats !" exclaimed Old Pipes. "What do you mean by that?"

The girl, who stood behind the old man, shook her head, put her hand on her mouth, and made all sorts of signs to the boy to stop talking on this subject ; but he did not notice her, and promptly answered Old Pipes.

"Why, you see, good sir," said he, "that as the cattle can't hear your pipes now, somebody has to go after them every evening to drive them down from the mountain, and the Chief Villager has hired us three to do it.

Generally it is not very hard work, but to-night the cattle had wandered far."

"How long have you been doing this?" asked the old man.

The girl shook her head and clapped her hand on her mouth as before, but the boy went on.

"I think it is about a year now," he said, "since the people first felt sure that the cattle could not hear your pipes; and from that time we've been driving them down. But we are rested now, and will go home. Good-night, sir."

The three children then went down the hill, the girl scolding the boy all the way home. Old Pipes stood silent a few moments, and then he went into his cottage.

"Mother," he shouted, "did you hear what those children said?"

"Children!" exclaimed the old woman; "I did not hear them. I did not know there were any children here."

Then Old Pipes told his mother—shouting very loudly to make her hear—how the two boys and the girl had helped him up the hill, and what he had heard about his piping and the cattle.

"They can't hear you?" cried his mother. "Why, what's the matter with the cattle?"

"Ah, me!" said Old Pipes; "I don't believe there's anything the matter with the cattle. It must be with me and my pipes that there is something the matter. But one thing is certain: if I do not earn the wages the Chief Villager pays me, I shall not take them. I shall go straight down to the village and give back the money I received to-day."

"Nonsense!" cried his mother. "I'm sure you've piped as well as you could, and no more can be expected. And what are we to do without the money?"

"I don't know," said Old Pipes; "but I'm going down to the village to pay it back."

The sun had now set; but the moon was shining very brightly on the hill-side, and Old Pipes could see his way very well. He did not take the same path by which he had gone before, but followed another, which led among the trees upon the hill-side, and, though longer, was not so steep.

When he had gone about half-way, the old man sat down to rest, leaning his back against a great oak tree. As he did so, he heard a sound like knocking inside the tree, and then a voice said:

"Let me out! let me out!"

Old Pipes instantly forgot that he was

tired, and sprang to his feet. "This must be a Dryad tree!" he exclaimed. "If it is, I'll let her out."

Old Pipes had never, to his knowledge, seen a Dryad tree, but he knew there were such trees on the hill-sides and the mountains, and that Dryads lived in them. He knew, too, that in the summer-time, on those days when the moon rose before the sun went down, a Dryad could come out of her tree if any one could find the key which locked her in, and turn it. Old Pipes closely examined the trunk of the tree, which stood in the full moonlight. "If I see that key," he said, "I shall surely turn it." Before long he found a piece of bark standing out from the tree, which looked to him very much like the handle of a key. He took hold of it, and found he could turn it quite around. As he did so, a large part of the side of the tree was pushed open, and a beautiful Dryad stepped quickly out.

For a moment she stood motionless, gazing on the scene before her—the tranquil valley, the hills, the forest, and the mountain-side, all lying in the soft clear light of the moon. "Oh, lovely! lovely!" she exclaimed. "How long it is since I have seen anything like this!" And then, turning to Old Pipes, she said:

"How good of you to let me out! I am so happy, and so thankful, that I must kiss you, you dear old man!" And she threw her arms around the neck of Old Pipes, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You don't know," she then went on to say, "how doleful it is to be shut up so long in a tree. I don't mind it in the winter, for then I am glad to be sheltered, but in summer it is a rueful thing not to be able to see all the beauties of the world. And it's ever so long since I've been let out. People so seldom come this way; and when they do come at the right time, they either don't hear me or they are frightened and run away. But you, you dear old man, you were not frightened, and you looked and looked for the key, and you let me out; and now I shall not have to go back till winter has come, and the air grows cold. Oh, it is glorious! What can I do for you, to show you how grateful I am?"

"I am very glad," said Old Pipes, "that I let you out, since I see that it makes you so happy; but I must admit that I tried to find the key because I had a great desire to see a Dryad. But, if you wish to do something for me, you can, if you happen to be going down toward the village."

"To the village!" exclaimed the Dryad. "I will go anywhere for you, my kind old benefactor."

"Well, then," said Old Pipes, "I wish you would take this little bag of money to the Chief Villager and tell him that Old Pipes cannot receive pay for the services which he does not perform. It is now more than a year that I have not been able to make the cattle hear me, when I piped to call them home. I did not know this until to-night; but now that I know it, I cannot keep the money, and so I send it back." And, handing the little bag to the Dryad, he bade her good-night, and turned toward his cottage.

"Good-night," said the Dryad. "And I thank you over, and over, and over again, you good old man!"

Old Pipes walked toward his home, very glad to be saved the fatigue of going all the way down to the village and back again. "To be sure," he said to himself, "this path does not seem at all steep, and I can walk along it very easily: but it would have tired me dreadfully to come up all the way from the village, especially as I could not have expected those children to help me again." When he reached home his mother was surprised to see him returning so soon.

“What!” she exclaimed; “have you already come back? What did the Chief Villager say? Did he take the money?”

Old Pipes was just about to tell her that he had sent the money to the village by a Dryad, when he suddenly reflected that his mother would be sure to disapprove such a proceeding, and so he merely said he had sent it by a person whom he had met.

“And how do you know that the person will ever take it to the Chief Villager?” cried his mother. “You will lose it, and the villagers will never get it. Oh, Pipes! Pipes! when will you be old enough to have ordinary common-sense?”

Old Pipes considered that, as he was already seventy years of age, he could scarcely expect to grow any wiser; but he made no remark on this subject, and, saying that he doubted not that the money would go safely to its destination, he sat down to his supper. His mother scolded him roundly, but he did not mind it; and after supper he went out and sat on a rustic chair in front of the cottage to look at the moonlit village, and to wonder whether or not the Chief Villager really received the money. While he was doing these two things, he went fast asleep.

When Old Pipes left the Dryad, she did not go down to the village with the little bag of money. She held it in her hand, and thought about what she had heard. "This is a good and honest old man," she said; "and it is a shame that he should lose this money. He looked as if he needed it, and I don't believe the people in the village will take it from one who has served them so long. Often, when in my tree, have I heard the sweet notes of his pipes. I am going to take the money back to him." She did not start immediately, because there were so many beautiful things to look at; but after awhile she went up to the cottage, and, finding Old Pipes asleep in his chair, she slipped the little bag into his coat-pocket, and silently sped away.

The next day Old Pipes told his mother that he would go up the mountain and cut some wood. He had a right to get wood from the mountain, but for a long time he had been content to pick up the dead branches which lay about his cottage. To-day, however, he felt so strong and vigorous that he thought he would go and cut some fuel that would be better than this. He worked all the morning, and when he came back he did not feel at all tired, and he had a very good appetite for his dinner.

Now, Old Pipes knew a good deal about Dryads; but there was one thing which, although he had heard, he had forgotten. This was, that a kiss from a Dryad made a person ten years younger.

The people of the village knew this, and they were very careful not to let any child of ten years or younger go into the woods where the Dryads were supposed to be; for, if they should chance to be kissed by one of these tree-nymphs, they would be set back so far that they would cease to exist.

A story was told in the village that a very bad boy of eleven once ran away into the woods, and had an adventure of this kind; and when his mother found him he was a little baby of one year old. Taking advantage of her opportunity, she brought him up more carefully than she had done before, and he grew to be a very good boy indeed.

Now Old Pipes had been kissed twice by the Dryad, once on each cheek, and he therefore felt as vigorous and active as when he was a hale man of fifty. His mother noticed how much work he was doing, and told him that he need not try in that way to make up for the loss of his piping wages; for he would only tire himself out, and get sick. But her son

answered that he had not felt so well for years, and that he was quite able to work.

In the course of the afternoon, Old Pipes, for the first time that day, put his hand in his coat-pocket, and there, to his amazement, he found the little bag of money. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, "I am stupid, indeed! I really thought that I had seen a Dryad; but when I sat down by that big oak tree I must have gone to sleep and dreamed it all; and then I came home, thinking I had given the money to a Dryad, when it was in my pocket all the time. But the Chief Villager shall have the money. I shall not take it to him to-day, but to-morrow I wish to go to the village to see some of my old friends; and then I shall give up the money."

Toward the close of the afternoon, Old Pipes, as had been his custom for so many years, took his pipes from the shelf on which they lay, and went out to the rock in front of the cottage.

"What are you going to do?" cried his mother. "If you will not consent to be paid, why do you pipe?"

"I am going to pipe for my own pleasure," said her son. "I am used to it, and I do not wish to give it up. It does not matter now whether the cattle hear me or not, and I am sure that my piping will injure no one."

When the good man began to play upon his favorite instrument he was astonished at the sound that came from it. The beautiful notes of the pipes sounded clear and strong down into the valley, and spread over the hills, and up the sides of the mountain beyond, while, after a little interval, an echo came back from the rocky hill on the other side of the valley.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, "what has happened to my pipes? They must have been stopped up of late, but now they are as clear and good as ever."

Again the merry notes went sounding far and wide. The cattle on the mountain heard them, and those that were old enough remembered how these notes had called them from their pastures every evening, and so they started down the mountain-side, the others following.

The merry notes were heard in the village below, and the people were much astonished thereby. "Why, who can be blowing the pipes of Old Pipes?" they said. But, as they were all very busy, no one went up to see. One thing, however, was plain enough: the cattle were coming down the mountain. And so the two boys and the girl did not have to go after them, and had an hour for play, for which they were very glad.

The next morning Old Pipes started down to the village with his money, and on the way he met the Dryad. "Oh, ho!" he cried, "is that you? Why, I thought my letting you out of the tree was nothing but a dream."

"A dream!" cried the Dryad; "if you only knew how happy you have made me, you would not think it merely a dream. And has it not benefited you? Do you not feel happier? Yesterday I heard you playing beautifully on your pipes."

"Yes, yes," cried he. "I did not understand it before, but I see it all now. I have really grown younger. I thank you, I thank you, good Dryad, from the bottom of my heart. It was the finding of the money in my pocket that made me think it was a dream."

"Oh, I put it in when you were asleep," she said, laughing, "because I thought you ought to keep it. Good-by, kind, honest man. May you live long, and be as happy as I am now."

Old Pipes was greatly delighted when he understood that he was really a younger man; but that made no difference about the money, and he kept on his way to the village. As soon as he reached it, he was eagerly questioned as to who had been playing his pipes the evening before, and when the people heard that it was

himself they were very much surprised. Thereupon Old Pipes told what had happened to him, and then there was greater wonder, with hearty congratulations and hand-shakes ; for Old Pipes was liked by everyone. The Chief Villager refused to take his money ; and although Old Pipes said that he had not earned it, everyone present insisted that, as he would now play on his pipes as before, he should lose nothing because, for a time, he was unable to perform his duty.

So Old Pipes was obliged to keep his money, and after an hour or two spent in conversation with his friends he returned to his cottage.

There was one person, however, who was not pleased with what had happened to Old Pipes. This was an Echo-dwarf who lived on the hills across the valley. It was his work to echo back the notes of the pipes whenever they could be heard.

A great many other Echo-dwarfs lived on these hills. They all worked, but in different ways. Some echoed back the songs of maidens, some the shouts of children, and others the music that was often heard in the village. But there was only one who could send back the strong notes of the pipes of Old Pipes, and this had been his sole duty for many years. But

when the old man grew feeble, and the notes of his pipes could not be heard on the opposite hills, this Echo-dwarf had nothing to do, and he spent his time in delightful idleness; and he slept so much and grew so fat that it made his companions laugh to see him walk.

On the afternoon on which, after so long an interval, the sound of the pipes was heard on the echo hills, this dwarf was fast asleep behind a rock. As soon as the first notes reached them, some of his companions ran to wake him up. Rolling to his feet, he echoed back the merry tune of Old Pipes.

Naturally, he was very angry at being thus obliged to give up his life of comfort, and he hoped very much that this pipe-playing would not occur again. The next afternoon he was awake and listening, and, sure enough, at the usual hour, along came the notes of the pipes as clear and strong as they ever had been; and he was obliged to work as long as Old Pipes played. The Echo-dwarf was very angry. He had supposed, of course, that the pipe-playing had ceased forever, and he felt that he had a right to be indignant at being thus deceived. He was so much disturbed that he made up his mind to go and try to find out how long this was to last. He had plenty of time, as the

pipes were played but once a day, and he set off early in the morning for the hill on which Old Pipes lived. It was hard work for the fat little fellow, and when he had crossed the valley and had gone some distance into the woods on the hill-side, he stopped to rest, and in a few minutes the Dryad came tripping along.

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed the dwarf; "what are you doing here? and how did you get out of your tree?"

"Doing!" cried the Dryad; "I am being happy; that's what I am doing. And I was let out of my tree by the good old man who plays the pipes to call the cattle down from the mountain. And it makes me happier to think that I have been of service to him. I gave him two kisses of gratitude, and now he is young enough to play his pipes as well as ever."

The Echo-dwarf stepped forward, his face pale with passion, "Am I to believe," he said, "that you are the cause of this great evil that has come upon me? and that you are the wicked creature who has again started this old man upon his career of pipe-playing? What have I ever done to you that you should have condemned me for years and years to echo back the notes of those wretched pipes?"

At this the Dryad laughed loudly.

“What a funny little fellow you are!” she said. “Anyone would think you had been condemned to toil from morning till night; while what you really have to do is merely to imitate for half an hour every day the merry notes of Old Pipes’s piping. Fie upon you, Echo-dwarf! You are lazy and selfish; and that is what is the matter with you. Instead of grumbling at being obliged to do a little wholesome work, which is less, I am sure, than that of any other echo-dwarf upon the rocky hill-side, you should rejoice at the good fortune of the old man who has regained so much of his strength and vigor. Go home and learn to be just and generous; and then, perhaps, you may be happy. Good-by.”

“Insolent creature!” shouted the dwarf, as he shook his fat little fist at her. “I’ll make you suffer for this. You shall find out what it is to heap injury and insult upon one like me, and to snatch from him the repose that he has earned by long years of toil.” And, shaking his head savagely, he hurried back to the rocky hill-side.

Every afternoon the merry notes of the pipes of Old Pipes sounded down into the valley and over the hills and up the mountain-side; and every afternoon when he had echoed them

back, the little dwarf grew more and more angry with the Dryad. Each day, from early morning till it was time for him to go back to his duties upon the rocky hill-side, he searched the woods for her. He intended, if he met her, to pretend to be very sorry for what he had said, and he thought he might be able to play a trick upon her which would avenge him well.

One day, while thus wandering among the trees, he met Old Pipes. The Echo-dwarf did not generally care to see or speak to ordinary people; but now he was so anxious to find the object of his search, that he stopped and asked Old Pipes if he had seen the Dryad. The piper had not noticed the little fellow, and he looked down on him with some surprise.

"No," he said; "I have not seen her, and I have been looking everywhere for her."

"You!" cried the dwarf, "what do you wish with her?"

Old Pipes then sat down on a stone, so that he should be nearer the ear of his small companion, and he told what the Dryad had done for him.

When the Echo-dwarf heard that this was the man whose pipes he was obliged to echo back every day, he would have slain him on the spot, had he been able; but, as he was not able, he

merely ground his teeth and listened to the rest of the story.

"I am looking for the Dryad now," Old Pipes continued, "on account of my aged mother. When I was old myself, I did not notice how very old my mother was; but now it shocks me to see how feeble her years have caused her to become; and I am looking for the Dryad to ask her to make my mother younger, as she made me."

The eyes of the Echo-dwarf glistened. Here was a man who might help him in his plans.

"Your idea is a good one," he said to Old Pipes, "and it does you honor. But you should know that a Dryad can make no person younger but one who lets her out of her tree. However, you can manage the affair very easily. All you need do is to find the Dryad, tell her what you want, and request her to step into her tree and be shut up for a short time. Then you will go and bring your mother to the tree; she will open it, and every thing will be as you wish. Is not this a good plan?"

"Excellent!" cried Old Pipes; "and I will go instantly and search more diligently for the Dryad."

"Take me with you," said the Echo-dwarf. "You can easily carry me on your strong

shoulders; and I shall be glad to help you in any way that I can."

"Now then," said the little fellow to himself, as Old Pipes carried him rapidly along, "if he persuades the Dryad to get into a tree,—and she is quite foolish enough to do it,—and then goes away to bring his mother, I shall take a stone or a club and I will break off the key of that tree, so that nobody can ever turn it again. Then Mistress Dryad will see what she has brought upon herself by her behavior to me."

Before long they came to the great oak-tree in which the Dryad had lived, and at a distance they saw that beautiful creature herself coming toward them.

"How excellently well everything happens?" said the dwarf. "Put me down, and I will go. Your business with the Dryad is more important than mine; and you need not say anything about my having suggested your plan to you. I am willing that you should have all the credit of it yourself."

Old Pipes put the Echo-dwarf upon the ground, but the little rogue did not go away. He hid himself between some low, mossy rocks, and he was so much like them in color that you would not have noticed him if you had been looking straight at him.

When the Dryad came up, Old Pipes lost no time in telling her about his mother, and what he wished her to do. At first, the Dryad answered nothing, but stood looking very sadly at Old Pipes.

"Do you really wish me to go *into* my tree again?" she said. "I should dreadfully dislike to do it, for I don't know what might happen. It is not at all necessary, for I could make your mother younger at any time if she would give me the opportunity. I had already thought of making you still happier in this way, and several times I have waited about your cottage, hoping to meet your aged mother, but she never comes outside, and you know a Dryad cannot enter a house. I cannot imagine what put this idea into your head. Did you think of it yourself?"

"No, I cannot say that I did," answered Old Pipes. "A little dwarf whom I met in the woods proposed it to me."

"Oh!" cried the Dryad; "now I see through it all. It is the scheme of that vile Echo-dwarf—your enemy and mine. Where is he? I should like to see him."

"I think he has gone away," said Old Pipes.

"No, he has not," said the Dryad, whose quick eyes perceived the Echo-dwarf among

the rocks, "There he is. Seize him and drag him out, I beg of you."

Old Pipes saw the dwarf as soon as he was pointed out to him; and running to the rocks, he caught the little fellow by the arm and pulled him out.

"Now, then," cried the Dryad, who had opened the door of the great oak, "just stick him in there, and we will shut him up. Then I shall be safe from his mischief for the rest of the time I am free."

Old Pipes thrust the Echo-dwarf into the tree; the Dryad pushed the door shut; there was a clicking sound of bark and wood, and no one would have noticed that the big oak had ever had an opening in it.

"There," said the Dryad; "now we need not be afraid of him. And I assure you, my good piper, that I shall be very glad to make your mother younger as soon as I can. Will you not ask her to come out and meet me?"

"Of course I will," cried Old Pipes; "and I will do it without delay."

And then, the Dryad by his side, he hurried to his cottage. But when he mentioned the matter to his mother, the old woman became very angry indeed. She did not believe in Dryads; and, if they really did exist, she knew

they must be witches and sorceresses, and she would have nothing to do with them. If her son had ever allowed himself to be kissed by one of them, he ought to be ashamed of himself. As to its doing him the least bit of good, she did not believe a word of it. He felt better than he used to feel, but that was very common. She had sometimes felt that way herself, and she forbade him ever to mention a Dryad to her again.

That afternoon, Old Pipes, feeling very sad that his plan in regard to his mother had failed, sat down upon the rock and played upon his pipes. The pleasant sounds went down the valley and up the hills and mountain, but, to the great surprise of some persons who happened to notice the fact, the notes were not echoed back from the rocky hill-side, but from the woods on the side of the valley on which Old Pipes lived. The next day many of the villagers stopped in their work to listen to the echo of the pipes coming from the woods. The sound was not as clear and strong as it used to be when it was sent back from the rocky hill-side, but it certainly came from among the trees. Such a thing as an echo changing its place in this way had never been heard of before, and nobody was able to explain how it could have

happened. Old Pipes, however, knew very well that the sound came from the Echo-dwarf shut up in the great oak tree. The sides of the tree were thin, and the sound of the pipes could be heard through them, and the dwarf was obliged by the laws of his being to echo back those notes whenever they came to him. But Old Pipes thought he might get the Dryad in trouble if he let anyone know that the Echo-dwarf was shut up in the tree, and so he wisely said nothing about it.

One day the two boys and the girl who had helped Old Pipes up the hill were playing in the woods. Stopping near the great oak tree, they heard a sound of knocking within it, and then a voice plainly said:

"Let me out! let me out!"

For a moment the children stood still in astonishment, and then one of the boys exclaimed:

"Oh, it is a Dryad, like the one Old Pipes found! Let's let her out!"

"What are you thinking of?" cried the girl. "I am the oldest of all, and I am only thirteen. Do you wish to be turned into crawling babies? Run! run! run!"

And the two boys and the girl dashed down into the valley as fast as their legs could carry

them. There was no desire in their youthful hearts to be made younger than they were, and for fear that their parents might think it well that they should commence their careers anew, they never said a word about finding the Dryad tree.

As the summer days went on, Old Pipes' mother grew feebler and feebler. One day when her son was away, for he now frequently went into the woods to hunt or fish, or down into the valley to work, she arose from her knitting to prepare the simple dinner. But she felt so weak and tired that she was not able to do the work to which she had been so long accustomed. "Alas! alas!" she said, "the time has come when I am too old to work. My son will have to hire some one to come here and cook his meals, make his bed, and mend his clothes. Alas! alas! I had hoped that as long as I lived I should be able to do these things. But it is not so. I have grown utterly worthless, and some one else must prepare the dinner for my son. I wonder where he is." And tottering to the door, she went outside to look for him. She did not feel able to stand, and reaching the rustic chair, she sank into it, quite exhausted, and soon fell asleep.

The Dryad, who had often come to the cot-

rage to see if she could find an opportunity of carrying out Old Pipes's affectionate design, now happened by; and seeing that the much-desired occasion had come, she stepped up quietly behind the old woman and gently kissed her on each cheek, and then as quietly disappeared.

In a few minutes the mother of Old Pipes awoke, and looking up at the sun, she exclaimed: "Why, it is almost dinner-time! My son will be here directly, and I am not ready for him." And rising to her feet, she hurried into the house, made the fire, set the meat and vegetables to cook, laid the cloth, and by the time her son arrived the meal was on the table.

"How a little sleep does refresh one," she said to herself, as she was bustling about. She was a woman of very vigorous constitution, and at seventy had been a great deal stronger and more active than her son was at that age. The moment Old Pipes saw his mother, he knew that the Dryad had been there; but, while he felt as happy as a king, he was too wise to say anything about her.

"It is astonishing how well I feel to-day," said his mother; "and either my hearing has improved or you speak much more plainly than you have done of late."

The summer days went on and passed away, the leaves were falling from the trees, and the air was becoming cold.

"Nature has ceased to be lovely," said the Dryad, "and the night-winds chill me. It is time for me to go back into my comfortable quarters in the great oak. But first I must pay another visit to the cottage of Old Pipes."

She found the piper and his mother sitting side by side on the rock in front of the door. The cattle were not to go to the mountain any more that season, and he was piping them down for the last time. Loud and merrily sounded the pipes of Old Pipes, and down the mountain-side came the cattle, the cows by the easiest paths, the sheep by those not quite so easy, and the goats by the most difficult ones among the rocks; while from the great oak tree were heard the echoes of the cheerful music.

"How happy they look, sitting there together," said the Dryad; "and I don't believe it will do them a bit of harm to be still younger." And moving quietly up behind them, she first kissed Old Pipes on his cheek and then kissed his mother.

Old Pipes, who had stopped playing, knew what it was, but he did not move, and said nothing. His mother, thinking that her son

had kissed her, turned to him with a smile and kissed him in return. And then she arose and went into the cottage, a vigorous woman of sixty, followed by her son, erect and happy, and twenty years younger than herself.

The Dryad sped away to the woods, shrugging her shoulders as she felt the cool evening wind.

When she reached the great oak, she turned the key and opened the door. "Come out," she said to the Echo-dwarf, who sat blinking within. "Winter is coming on, and I want the comfortable shelter of my tree for myself. The cattle have come down from the mountain for the last time this year, the pipes will no longer sound, and you can go to your rocks and have a holiday until next spring."

Upon hearing these words the dwarf skipped quickly out, and the Dryad entered the tree and pulled the door shut after her. "Now, then," she said to herself, "he can break off the key if he likes. It does not matter to me. Another will grow out next spring. And although the good piper made me no promise, I know that when the warm days arrive next year, he will come and let me out again."

The Echo-dwarf did not stop to break the key of the tree. He was too happy to be re-

leased to think of anything else, and he hastened as fast as he could to his home on the rock^v hill-side.

The Dryad was not mistaken when she trusted in the piper. When the warm days came again he went to the oak tree to let her out. But, to his sorrow and surprise, he found the great tree lying upon the ground. A winter storm had blown it down, and it lay with its trunk shattered and split. And what became of the Dryad no one ever knew.

THE BEE-MAN OF ORN

IN the ancient country of Orn there lived an old man who was called the Bee-man, because his whole time was spent in the company of bees. He lived in a small hut, which was nothing more than an immense bee-hive, for these little creatures had built their honey-combs in every corner of the one room it contained, on the shelves, under the little table, all about the rough bench on which the old man sat, and even about the head-board and along the sides of his low bed.

All day the air of the room was thick with buzzing insects, but this did not interfere in any way with the old Bee-man, who walked in among them, ate his meals, and went to sleep, without the slightest fear of being stung.

He had lived with the bees so long, they had become so accustomed to him, and his skin was so tough and hard, that the bees no more thought of stinging him than they would of stinging a tree or a stone. A swarm of bees

had made their hive in a pocket of his old leathern doublet; and when he put on this coat to take one of his long walks in the forest in search of wild bees' nests, he was very glad to have this hive with him, for, if he did not find any wild honey, he would put his hand in his pocket and take out a piece of a comb for a luncheon. The bees in his pocket worked very industriously, and he was always certain of having something to eat with him wherever he went. He lived principally upon honey; and when he needed bread or meat, he carried some fine combs to a village not far away and bartered them for other food. He was ugly, untidy, shrivelled, and brown. He was poor, and the bees seemed to be his only friends. But, for all that, he was happy and contented; he had all the honey he wanted, and his bees, whom he considered the best company in the world, were as friendly and sociable as they could be, and seemed to increase in number every day.

One day there stopped at the hut of the Bee-man a Junior Sorcerer. This young person, who was a student of magic, was much interested in the Bee-man, whom he had often noticed in his wanderings, and he considered him an admirable subject for study. He had

got a great deal of useful practice by trying to find out, by the various rules and laws of sorcery, exactly why the old Bee-man did not happen to be something that he was not, and why he was what he happened to be. He had studied a long time at this matter, and had found out something.

"Do you know," he said, when the Bee-man came out of his hut, "that you have been transformed?"

"What do you mean by that?" said the other, much surprised.

"You have surely heard of animals and human beings who have been magically transformed into different kinds of creatures?"

"Yes, I have heard of these things," said the Bee-man; "but what have I been transformed from?"

"That is more than I know," said the Junior Sorcerer. "But one thing is certain: you ought to be changed back. If you will find out what you have been transformed from, I will see that you are made all right again. Nothing would please me better than to attend to such a case."

And, having a great many things to study and investigate, the Junior Sorcerer went his way.

This information greatly disturbed the mind of the Bee-man. If he had been changed from something else, he ought to be that other thing, whatever it was. He ran after the young man, and overtook him.

"If you know, kind sir," he said, "that I have been transformed, you surely are able to tell me what it is that I was."

"No," said the Junior Sorcerer, "my studies have not proceeded far enough for that. When I become a senior I can tell you all about it. But, in the meantime, it will be well for you to try to find out for yourself your original form; and when you have done that, I will get some of the learned masters of my art to restore you to it. It will be easy enough to do that, but you could not expect them to take the time and trouble to find out what it was."

And, with these words, he hurried away, and was soon lost to view.

Greatly disturbed, the Bee-man retraced his steps, and went to his hut. Never before had he heard anything which had so troubled him.

"I wonder what I was transformed from?" he thought, seating himself on his rough bench. "Could it have been a giant, or a powerful prince, or some gorgeous being whom the magicians or the fairies wished to punish? It

may be that I was a dog or a horse, or perhaps a fiery dragon or a horrid snake. I hope it was not one of these. But whatever it was, everyone has certainly a right to his original form, and I am resolved to find out mine. I will start early to-morrow morning; and I am sorry now that I have not more pockets to my old doublet, so that I might carry more bees and more honey for my journey."

He spent the rest of the day in making a hive of twigs and straw; and, having transferred to this a number of honey-combs and a colony of bees which had just swarmed, he rose before sunrise the next day, and having put on his leathern doublet, and having bound his new hive to his back, he set forth on his quest, the bees who were to accompany him buzzing around him like a cloud.

As the Bee-man pressed through the little village the people greatly wondered at his queer appearance, with the hive upon his back. "The Bee-man is going on a long journey this time," they said; but no one imagined the strange business on which he was bent. About noon he sat down under a tree, near a beautiful meadow covered with blossoms, and ate a little honey. Then he untied his hive and stretched himself out on the grass to rest. As

he gazed upon his bees hovering about him, some going out to the blossoms in the sunshine, and some returning laden with the sweet pollen, he said to himself, "They know just what they have to do, and they do it; but alas for me! I know not what I may have to do. And yet, whatever it may be, I am determined to do it. In some way or other I will find out what was my original form, and then I will have myself changed back to it."

And now the thought came to him that perhaps his original form might have been something very disagreeable, or even horrid.

"But it does not matter," he said sturdily. "Whatever I was that shall I be again. It is not right for anyone to keep a form which does not properly belong to him. I have no doubt I shall discover my original form in the same way that I find the trees in which the wild bees hive. When I first catch sight of a bee tree I am drawn toward it, I know not how. Something says to me: 'That is what you are looking for.' In the same way I believe that I shall find my original form. When I see it, I shall be drawn toward it. Something will say to me: 'That is it.'"

When the Bee-man was rested he started off again, and in about an hour he entered a fair

domain. Around him were beautiful lawns, grand trees, and lovely gardens; while at a little distance stood the stately palace of the Lord of the Domain. Richly dressed people were walking about or sitting in the shade of the trees and arbors; splendidly equipped horses were waiting for their riders; and everywhere were seen signs of wealth and gayety.

"I think," said the Bee-man to himself, "that I should like to stop here for a time. If it should happen that I was originally like any of these happy creatures it would please me much."

He untied his hive, and hid it behind some bushes, and, taking off his old doublet, laid that beside it. It would not do to have his bees flying about him if he wished to go among the inhabitants of this fair domain.

For two days the Bee-man wandered about the palace and its grounds, avoiding notice as much as possible, but looking at everything. He saw handsome men and lovely ladies; the finest horses, dogs, and cattle that were ever known; beautiful birds in cages, and fishes in crystal globes: and it seemed to him that the best of all living things were here collected.

At the close of the second day the Bee-man said to himself: "There is one being here toward whom I feel very much drawn, and that

is the Lord of the Domain. I cannot feel certain that I was once like him, but it would be a very fine thing if it were so; and it seems impossible for me to be drawn toward any other being in the domain when I look upon him, so handsome, rich, and powerful. But I must observe him more closely, and feel more sure of the matter, before applying to the sorcerers to change me back into a lord of a fair domain."

The next morning the Bee-man saw the Lord of the Domain walking in his gardens. He slipped along the shady paths, and followed him so as to observe him closely, and find out if he were really drawn toward this noble and handsome being. The Lord of the Domain walked on for some time, not noticing that the Bee-man was behind him. But suddenly turning, he saw the little old man.

"What are you doing here, you vile beggar?" he cried, and he gave him a kick that sent him into some bushes that grew by the side of the path.

The Bee-man scrambled to his feet, and ran as fast as he could to the place where he had hidden his hive and his old doublet.

"If I am certain of anything," he thought, "it is that I was never a person who would

kick a poor old man. I will leave this place. I was transformed from nothing that I see here."

He now travelled for a day or two longer, and then he came to a great black mountain, near the bottom of which was an opening like the mouth of a cave.

This mountain he had heard was filled with caverns and underground passages, which were the abodes of dragons, evil spirits, horrid creatures of all kinds.

"Ah me!" said the Bee-man with a sigh, "I suppose I ought to visit this place. If I am going to do this thing properly, I should look on all sides of the subject, and I may have been one of those horrid creatures myself."

Thereupon he went to the mountain, and, as he approached the opening of the passage which led into its inmost recesses, he saw, sitting upon the ground, and leaning his back against a tree, a Languid Youth.

"Good-day," said this individual when he saw the Bee-man. "Are you going inside?"

"Yes," said the Bee-man, "that is what I intend to do."

"Then," said the Languid Youth, slowly rising to his feet, "I think I will go with you. I was told that if I went in there I should get

my energies toned up, and they need it very much; but I did not feel equal to entering by myself, and I thought I would wait until some one came along. I am very glad to see you, and we will go in together."

So the two went into the cave, and they had proceeded but a short distance when they met a very little creature, whom it was easy to recognize as a Very Imp. He was about two feet high, and resembled in color a freshly polished pair of boots. He was extremely lively and active, and came bounding toward them.

"What did you two people come here for?" he asked.

"I came," said the Languid Youth, "to have my energies toned up."

"You have come to the right place," said the Very Imp. "We will tone you up. And what does that old Bee-man want?"

"He has been transformed from something, and wants to find out what it is. He thinks he may have been one of the things in here."

"I should not wonder if that were so," said the Very Imp, rolling his head on one side, and eying the Bee-man with a critical gaze.

"All right," said the Very Imp; "he can go around, and pick out his previous existence. We have here all sorts of vile creepers, crawl-

ers, hissers, and snorters. I suppose he thinks anything will be better than a Bee-man."

"It is not because I want to be better than I am," said the Bee-man, "that I started out on this search. I have simply an honest desire to become what I originally was."

"Oh! that is it, is it?" said the other. "There is an idiotic moon-calf here with a clam head, which must be just like what you used to be."

"Nonsense," said the Bee-man. "You have not the least idea what an honest purpose is. I shall go about and see for myself."

"Go ahead," said the Very Imp, "and I will attend to this fellow who wants to be toned up." So saying he joined the Languid Youth.

"Look here," said the Youth, "do you black and shine yourself every morning?"

"No," said the other, "it is water-proof varnish. You want to be invigorated, don't you? Well, I will tell you a splendid way to begin. You see that Bee-man has put down his hive and his coat with the bees in it. Just wait till he gets out of sight, and then catch a lot of those bees, and squeeze them flat. If you spread them on a sticky rag, and make a plaster, and put it on the small of your back, it will invigorate you like every-

thing, especially if some of the bees are not quite dead."

"Yes," said the Languid Youth, looking at him with his mild eyes, "but if I had energy enough to catch a bee I would be satisfied. Suppose you catch a lot for me."

"The subject is changed," said the Very Imp. "We are now about to visit the spacious chamber of the King of the Snap-dragons."

"That is a flower," said the Languid Youth.

"You will find him a gay old blossom," said the other. "When he has chased you round his room, and has blown sparks at you, and has snorted and howled, and cracked his tail, and snapped his jaws like a pair of anvils, your energies will be toned up higher than ever before in your life."

"No doubt of it," said the Languid Youth; "but I think I will begin with something a little milder."

"Well, then," said the other, "there is a flat-tailed Demon of the Gorge in here. He is generally asleep, and, if you say so, you can slip into the farthest corner of his cave, and I'll solder his tail to the opposite wall. Then he will rage and roar, but he can't get at you, for he doesn't reach all the way across his cave; I have measured him. It will tone

you up wonderfully to sit there and watch him."

"Very likely," said the Languid Youth; "but I would rather stay outside and let you go up in the corner. The performance in that way will be more interesting to me."

"You are dreadfully hard to please," said the Very Imp. "I have offered them to you loose, and I have offered them fastened to a wall, and now the best thing I can do is to give you a chance at one of them that can't move at all. It is the Ghastly Griffin, and is enchanted. He can't stir so much as the tip of his whiskers for a thousand years. You can go to his cave and examine him just as if he were stuffed, and then you can sit on his back and think how it would be if you should live to be a thousand years old, and he should wake up while you are sitting there. It would be easy to imagine a lot of horrible things he would do to you when you look at his open mouth with its awful fangs, his dreadful claws, and his horrible wings all covered with spikes."

"I think that might suit me," said the Languid Youth. "I would much rather imagine the exercises of these monsters than to see them really going on."

"Come on, then," said the Very Imp, and

he led the way to the cave of the Ghastly Griffin.

The Bee-man went by himself through a great part of the mountain, and looked into many of its gloomy caves and recesses, recoiling in horror from most of the dreadful monsters who met his eyes. While he was wandering about, an awful roar was heard resounding through the passages of the mountain, and soon there came flapping along an enormous dragon, with body black as night, and wings and tail of fiery red. In his great fore-claws he bore a little baby.

"Horrible!" exclaimed the Bee-man. "He is taking that little creature to his cave to devour it."

He saw the dragon enter a cave not far away, and, following, looked in. The dragon was crouched upon the ground with the little baby lying before him. It did not seem to be hurt, but was frightened and crying. The monster was looking upon it with delight, as if he intended to make a dainty meal of it as soon as his appetite should be a little stronger.

"It is too bad!" thought the Bee-man. "Somebody ought to do something." And turning around, he ran away as fast as he could.

He ran through various passages until he came to the spot where he had left his bee-hive. Picking it up, he hurried back, carrying the hive in his two hands before him. When he reached the cave of the dragon, he looked in and saw the monster still crouched over the weeping child. Without a moment's hesitation, the Bee-man rushed into the cave and threw his hive straight into the face of the dragon. The bees, enraged by the shock, rushed out in an angry crowd and immediately fell upon the head, mouth, eyes, and nose of the dragon. The great monster, astounded by this sudden attack, and driven almost wild by the numberless stings of the bees, sprang back to the farthest corner of his cave, still followed by the bees, at whom he flapped wildly with his great wings and struck with his paws. While the dragon was thus engaged with the bees, the Bee-man rushed forward, and, seizing the child, he hurried away. He did not stop to pick up his doublet, but kept on until he reached the entrance of the cave. There he saw the Very Imp hopping along on one leg, and rubbing his back and shoulders with his hands, and stopped to inquire what was the matter, and what had become of the Languid Youth.

"He is no kind of a fellow," said the Very Imp. "He disappointed me dreadfully. I took him up to the Ghastly Griffin, and told him the thing was enchanted, and that he might sit on its back and think about what it could do if it was awake; and when he came near it the wretched creature opened its eyes, and raised its head, and then you ought to have seen how mad that simpleton was. He made a dash at me and seized me by the ears; he kicked and beat me till I can scarcely move."

"His energies must have been toned up a good deal," said the Bee-man.

"Toned up! I should say so!" cried the other. "I raised a howl, and a Scissor-jawed Clipper came out of his hole, and got after him; but that lazy fool ran so fast that he could not be caught."

The Bee-man now ran on and soon overtook the Languid Youth.

"You need not be in a hurry now," said the latter, "for the rules of this institution don't allow the creatures inside to come out of this opening, or to hang around it. If they did, they would frighten away visitors. They go in and out of holes in the upper part of the mountain."

The two proceeded on their way.

"What are you going to do with that baby?" said the Languid Youth.

"I shall carry it along with me," said the Bee-man, "as I go on with my search, and perhaps I may find its mother. If I do not, I shall give it to somebody in that little village yonder. Anything would be better than leaving it to be devoured by that horrid dragon."

"Let me carry it. I feel quite strong enough now to carry a baby."

"Thank you," said the Bee-man; "but I can take it myself. I like to carry something, and I have now neither my hive nor my doublet."

"It is very well that you had to leave them behind," said the Youth, "for the bees would have stung the baby."

"My bees never sting babies," said the other.

"They probably never had a chance," remarked his companion.

They soon entered the village, and after walking a short distance the Youth exclaimed: "Do you see that woman over there sitting at the door of her house? She has beautiful hair, and she is tearing it all to pieces. She should not be allowed to do that."

"No," said the Bee-man. "Her friends should tie her hands."

"Perhaps she is the mother of this child,"

said the Youth, "and if you give it to her she will no longer think of tearing her hair."

"But," said the Bee-man, "you don't really think this is her child?"

"Suppose you go over and see," said the other.

The Bee-man hesitated a moment, and then he walked toward the woman. Hearing him coming, she raised her head, and when she saw the child she rushed toward it, snatched it into her arms, and screaming with joy she covered it with kisses. Then with happy tears she begged to know the story of the rescue of her child, whom she never expected to see again; and she loaded the Bee-man with thanks and blessings. The friends and neighbors gathered around, and there was great rejoicing. The mother urged the Bee-man and the Youth to stay with her, and rest and refresh themselves, which they were glad to do, as they were tired and hungry.

They remained at the cottage all night, and in the afternoon of the next day the Bee-man said to the Youth: "It may seem an odd thing to you, but never in all my life have I felt myself drawn toward any living being as I am drawn toward this baby. Therefore I believe that I have been transformed from a baby."

“ Good ! ” cried the Youth. “ It is my opinion that you have hit the truth. And now would you like to be changed back to your original form ? ”

“ Indeed I would ! ” said the Bee-man. “ I have the strongest yearning to be what I originally was. ”

The Youth, who had now lost every trace of languid feeling, took a great interest in the matter, and early the next morning started off to tell the Junior Sorcerer that the Bee-man had discovered what he had been transformed from, and desired to be changed back to it.

The Junior Sorcerer and his learned Masters were filled with delight when they heard this report, and they at once set out for the mother’s cottage. And there by magic arts the Bee-man was changed back into a baby. The mother was so grateful for what the Bee-man had done for her that she agreed to take charge of this baby, and to bring it up as her own.

“ It will be a grand thing for him, ” said the Junior Sorcerer, “ and I am glad that I studied his case. He will now have a fresh start in life, and will have a chance to become something better than a miserable old man living in a wretched hut with no friends or companions but buzzing bees. ”

The Junior Sorcerer and his Masters then returned to their homes, happy in the success of their great performance; and the Youth went back to his home anxious to begin a life of activity and energy.

Years and years afterward, when the Junior Sorcerer had become a Senior and was very old indeed, he passed through the country of Orn, and noticed a small hut about which swarms of bees were flying. He approached it, and looking in at the door he saw an old man in a leathern doublet, sitting at a table, eating honey. By his magic art he knew this was the baby which had been transformed from the Bee-man.

“Upon my word!” exclaimed the Sorcerer, “he has grown into the same thing again!”

THE CLOCKS OF RONDAINE

CENTURIES ago, there stood on the banks of a river a little town called Rondaine. The river was a long and winding stream which ran through different countries, and was sometimes narrow and swift, and sometimes broad and placid; sometimes hurrying through mountain passes, and again meandering quietly through fertile plains; in some places of a blue color and almost transparent, and in others of a dark and sombre hue; and so it changed until it threw itself into a warm, far-spreading sea.

But it was quite otherwise with the little town. As far back as anybody could remember, it had always been the same that it was at the time of our story; and the people who lived there could see no reason to suppose that it would ever be different from what it was then. It was a pleasant little town, its citizens were very happy; and why there should be any change in it, the most astute old man in all Rondaine could not have told you.



ARLA AND THE SACRISTAN.

If Rondaine had been famed for anything at all, it would have been for the number of its clocks. It had many churches, some little ones in dark side streets, and some larger ones in wider avenues, besides here and there a very good-sized church fronting on a park or open square; and in the steeple of each of these churches there was a clock.

There were town buildings, very old ones, which stood upon the great central square. Each of these had a tower, and in each tower was a clock.

Then there were clocks at street corners, and two clocks in the market-place, and clocks over shop-doors, a clock at each end of the bridge, and several large clocks a little way out of town. Many of these clocks were fashioned in some quaint and curious way. In one of the largest a stone man came out and struck the hours with a stone hammer, while a stone woman struck the half hours with a stone broom; and in another an iron donkey kicked the hours on a bell behind him.

It would be impossible to tell all the odd ways in which the clocks of Rondaine struck; but in one respect they were alike: they all did strike. The good people of the town would not have tolerated a clock which did not strike.

It was very interesting to lie awake in the night and hear the clocks of Rondaine strike. First would come a faint striking from one of the churches in the by-streets, a modest sound, as if the clock was not sure whether it was too early or not; then from another quarter would be heard a more confident clock striking the hour clearly and distinctly.

When they were quite ready, but not a moment before, the seven bells of the large church on the square would chime the hour; after which, at a respectful interval of time, the other church clocks of the town would strike. After the lapse of three or four minutes, the sound of all these bells seemed to wake up the stone man in the tower of the town building, and he struck the hour with his hammer. When this had been done, the other town-clocks felt at liberty to strike, and they did so. And when every sound had died away, so that he would be certain to be heard if there was any one awake to hear, it would be very likely that the iron donkey would kick out the hour on his bell. But there were times when he kicked before any of the clocks began to strike.

One by one the clocks on the street corners struck, the uptown ones first, and afterward those near the river. These were followed by

the two clocks on the bridge, the one at the country end waiting until it was quite sure that the one at the town end had finished. Somewhat later would be heard the clock of Vougereau, an old country-house in the suburbs. This clock, a very large one, was on the top of a great square stone tower, and from its age it had acquired a habit of deliberation; and when it began to strike people were very apt to think that it was one o'clock, until after an interval another stroke would tell them that it was later or earlier than that, and if they really wanted to know what hour the old clock was striking they must give themselves time enough to listen until they were entirely certain that it had finished.

The very last clock to strike in Rondaine was one belonging to a little old lady with white hair, who lived in a little white house in one of the prettiest and cleanest streets in the town. Her clock was in a little white tower at the corner of her house, and was the only strictly private clock which was in the habit of making itself publicly heard. Long after every other clock had struck, and when there was every reason to believe that for some time nothing but half-hours would be heard in Rondaine, the old lady's clock would strike quickly and with a

tone that said, "I know I am right, and I wish other people to know it."

In a small house which stood at a corner of two streets in the town there lived a young girl named Arla. For a year or more this young girl had been in the habit of waking up very early in the morning, sometimes long before daylight, and it had become a habit with her to lie and listen to the clocks. Her room was at the top of the house, and one of its windows opened to the west and another to the south, so that sounds entered from different quarters. Arla liked to leave these windows open so that the sounds of the clocks might come in.

Arla knew every clock by its tone, and she always made it a point to lie awake until she was positively sure that the last stroke of the clock at Vougereau had sounded; but it often happened that sleep overcame her before she heard the clock of the little old lady with white hair. It was so very long to wait for that!

It was not because she wanted to know the hour that Arla used to lie and listen to the clocks. She could tell this from her own little clock in her room. This little clock, which had been given to her when she was a small girl, not only struck the hours and half-hours and

quarter-hours, but there was attached to it a very pretty contrivance which also told the time. On the front of the clock, just below the dial, was a sprig of a rosebush beautifully made of metal, and on this, just after the hour had sounded, there was a large green bud; at a quarter past the hour this bud opened a little, so that the red petals could be seen; fifteen minutes later it was a half-blown rose, and at a quarter of an hour more it was nearly full blown; just before the hour the rose opened to its fullest extent, and so remained until the clock had finished striking, when it immediately shut up into a great green bud. This clock was a great delight to Arla; for not only was it a very pleasant thing to watch the unfolding of the rose, but it was a continual satisfaction to her to think that her little clock always told her exactly what time it was, no matter what the other clocks of Rondaine might say.

Arla's father and mother were thrifty, industrious people, who were very fond of their daughter, and wished her to grow up a thoughtful, useful woman. In the very early morning, listening to the clocks of Rondaine or waiting for them, Arla did a great deal of thinking; and it so happened, on the morning of the day before Christmas, when the stars were bright

and the air frosty, and every outside sound very clear and distinct, that Arla began to think of something which had never entered her mind before.

"How in the world," she said to herself, "do the people of Rondaine know when it is really Christmas? Christmas begins as soon as it is twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve; but as some of the people depend for the time upon one clock and some upon others, a great many of them cannot truly know when Christmas Day has really begun. Even some of the church clocks make people think that Christmas has come, when in reality it is yet the day before. And not one of them strikes at the right time! As for that iron donkey, I believe he kicks whenever he feels like it. And yet there are people who go by him! I know this, for they have told me so. But the little old lady with white hair is worse off than anybody else. Christmas must always come ever so long before she knows it."

With these thoughts on her mind, Arla could not go to sleep again. She heard all the clocks strike, and lay awake until her own little clock told her that she ought to get up. During this time she had made up her mind what she should do. There was yet one day before

Christmas; and if the people of the town could be made to see in what a deplorable condition they were on account of the difference in their clocks, they might have time to set the matter right so that all the clocks should strike the correct hour, and everybody should know exactly when Christmas Day began. She was sure that the citizens had never given this matter proper thought; and it was quite natural that such should be the case, for it was not every one who was in the habit of lying awake in the very early morning; and in the daytime, with all the out-door noises, one could not hear all the clocks strike in Rondaine. Arla, therefore, thought that a great deal depended upon her, who knew exactly how this matter stood.

When she went down to breakfast she asked permission of her mother to take a day's holiday. As she was a good girl, and never neglected either her lessons or her tasks, her mother was quite willing to give her the day before Christmas in which she could do as she pleased.

The day was cool, but the sun shone brightly and the air was pleasant. In the country around about Rondaine Christmas-time was not a very cold season. Arla put on a warm jacket and a

pretty blue hood, and started out gayly to attend to the business in hand.

Everybody in Rondaine knew her father and mother, and a great many of them knew her, so there was no reason why she should be afraid to go where she chose. In one hand she carried a small covered basket in which she had placed her rose clock. The works of this little clock were regulated by a balance-wheel, like those of a watch, and therefore it could be carried about without stopping it.

The first place she visited was the church at which she and her parents always attended service. It was a small building in a little square at the bottom of a hill, and, to reach it, one had to go down a long flight of stone steps. When she entered the dimly lighted church, Arla soon saw the sacristan, a pleasant-faced little old man whom she knew very well.

"Good-morning, sir," said she. "Do you take care of the church clock?"

The sacristan was sweeping the stone pavements of the church, just inside the door. He stopped and leaned upon his broom. "Yes, my little friend," he said, "I take care of everything here except the souls of the people."

"Well, then," said Arla, "I think you ought to know that your clock is eleven minutes too

fast. I came here to tell you that, so that you might change it, and make it strike properly."

The sacristan's eyes began to twinkle. He was a man of merry mood. "That is very good of you, little Arla; very good indeed. And, now that we are about it, isn't there something else you would like to change? What do you say to having these stone pillars put to one side, so that they may be out of the way of the people when they come in? Or those great beams in the roof—they might be turned over, and perhaps we might find that the upper side would look fresher than this lower part, which is somewhat time-stained, as you see? Or, for the matter of that, what do you say to having our clock-tower taken down and set out there in the square before the church door? Then short-sighted people could see the time much better, don't you think? Now tell me, shall we do all these things together, wise little friend?"

A tear or two came into Arla's eyes, but she made no answer.

"Good-morning, sir," she said, and went away.

"I suppose," she said to herself as she ran up the stone steps, "that he thought it would be too much trouble to climb to the top of the

tower to set the clock right. But that was no reason why he should make fun of me. I don't like him as much as I used to."

The next church to which Arla went was a large one, and it was some time before she could find the sacristan. At last she saw him in a side chapel at the upper end of the church, engaged in dusting some old books. He was a large man, with a red face, and he turned around quickly, with a stern expression, as she entered.

"Please, sir," said Arla, "I came to tell you that your church clock is wrong. It strikes from four to six minutes before it ought to; sometimes the one and sometimes the other. It should be changed so that it will be sure to strike at the right time."

The face of the sacristan grew redder and twitched visibly at her remark.

"Do you know what I wish?" he almost shouted in reply.

"No, sir," answered Arla.

"I wish," he said, "that you were a boy, so that I might take you by the collar and soundly cuff your ears, for coming here to insult an officer of the church in the midst of his duties! But, as you are a girl, I can only tell you to go away from here as rapidly and as quietly as you

can, or I shall have to put you in the hands of the church authorities!"

Arla was truly frightened, and although she did not run—for she knew that would not be proper in a church—she walked as fast as she could into the outer air.

"What a bad man," she then said to herself, "to be employed in a church! It surely is not known what sort of a person he is, or he would not be allowed to stay there a day!"

Arla thought she would not go to any more churches at present, for she did not know what sort of sacristans she might find in them.

"When the other clocks in the town all strike properly," she thought, "it is most likely they will see for themselves that their clocks are wrong, and they will have them changed."

She now made her way to the great square of the town, and entered the building at the top of which stood the stone man with his hammer. She found the doorkeeper in a little room by the side of the entrance. She knew where to go, for she had been there with her mother to ask permission to go up and see the stone man strike the hour with his hammer, and the stone woman strike the half-hour with her broom.

The doorkeeper was a grave, middle-aged man with spectacles; and, remembering what

had just happened, Arla thought she would be careful how she spoke to him.

"If you please, sir," she said, with a courtesy, "I should like to say something to you. And I hope you will not be offended when I tell you that your clock is not quite right. Your stone man and your stone woman are both too slow; they sometimes strike as much as seven minutes after they ought to strike."

The grave, middle-aged man looked steadily at her through his spectacles.

"I thought," continued Arla, "that if this should be made known to you, you would have the works of the stone man and the stone woman altered so that they might strike at the right time. They can be heard so far, you know, that it is very necessary they should not make mistakes."

"Child," said the man, with his spectacles still steadily fixed on her, "for one hundred and fifty-seven years the open tower on this building has stood there. For one hundred and fifty-seven years the thunder and the lightning in time of storm have roared and flashed around it, and the sun in time of fair weather has shone upon it. In that century and a half and seven years men and women have lived and have died, and their children and their

grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, and even the children of these, have lived and died after them. Kings and queens have passed away, one after another; and all things living have grown old and died, one generation after another, many times. And yet, through all these years, that stone man and that stone woman have stood there, and in storm and in fair weather, by daylight or in the darkness of night, they have struck the hours and the half-hours. Of all things that one hundred and fifty-seven years ago were able to lift an arm to strike, they alone are left. And now you, a child of thirteen, or perhaps fourteen years, come to me and ask me to change that which has not been changed for a century and a half and seven years!"

Arla could answer nothing with those spectacles fixed upon her. They seemed to glare more and more as she looked at them. "Good-morning, sir," she said, dropping a courtesy as she moved backward toward the door. Reaching it, she turned and hurried into the street.

"If those stone people," she thought, "have not been altered in all these years, it is likely they would now be striking two or three hours out of the way! But I don't know. If they

kept on going slow for more than a century, they must have come around to the right hour sometimes. But they will have to strike ever and ever so much longer before they come around there again ! ”

Arla now walked on until she came to a street corner where a cobbler had a little shop. In the angle of the wall of the house, at the height of the second story, was a clock. This cobbler did not like the confined air and poor light of his shop, and whenever the weather allowed he always worked outside on the sidewalk. To-day, although it was winter, the sun shone brightly on this side of the street, and he had put his bench outside, close to his door, and was sitting there, hard at work. When Arla stopped before him he looked up and said, cheerfully :

“ Good-morning, Mistress Arla. Do you want them half-soled, or heeled, or a patch put on the toes ? ”

“ My shoes do not need mending,” said Arla. “ I came to ask you if you could tell me who has charge of the clock at this corner ? ”

“ I can easily do that,” he said, “ for I am the man. I am paid by the year, for winding it up and keeping it in order, as much as I should

get for putting the soles, heels, tops, linings, and buckles on a pair of shoes."

"Which means making them out and out," said Arla.

"You are right," said he, "and the pay is not great; but if it were larger, more people might want it and I might lose it; and if it were less, how could I afford to do it at all? So I am satisfied."

"But you ought not to be entirely satisfied," said Arla, "for the clock does not keep good time. I know when it is striking, for it has a very jangling sound, and it is the most irregular clock in Rondaine. Sometimes it strikes as much as twenty-five minutes after the hour, and very often it does not strike at all."

The cobbler looked up at her with a smile. "I am sorry," he said, "that it has a jangling stroke, but the fashioning of clocks is not my trade, and I could not mend its sound with awl, hammer, or waxed-end. But it seems to me, my good maiden, that you never mended a pair of shoes."

"No, indeed!" said Arla; "I should do that even worse than you would make clocks."

"Never having mended shoes, then," said the cobbler, "you do not know what a grievous thing it is to have twelve o'clock, or six o'clock,

or any other hour, in fact, come before you are ready for it. Now, I don't mind telling you, because I know you are too good to spoil the trade of a hard-working cobbler—and shoemaker too, whenever he gets the chance to be one—that when I have promised a customer that he shall have his shoes or his boots at a certain time of day, and that time is drawing near, and the end of the job is still somewhat distant, then do I skip up the stairway and set back the hands of the clock according to the work that has to be done. And when my customer comes I look up to the clock-face and I say to him, 'Glad to see you!' and then he will look up at the clock and will say, 'Yes, I am a little too soon;' and then, as likely as not, he will sit down on the doorstep here by me and talk entertainingly; and it may happen that he will sit there without grumbling for many minutes after the clock has pointed out the hour at which the shoes were promised.

"Sometimes, when I have been much belated in beginning a job, I stop the clock altogether, for you can well see for yourself that it would not do to have it strike eleven when it is truly twelve. And so, if my man be willing to sit down, and our talk be very entertaining, the

clock being above him where he cannot see it without stepping outward from the house, he may not notice that it is stopped. This once served me very well, for an old gentleman, over-testy and over-punctual, once came to me for his shoes, and looking up at the clock, which I had prepared for him, exclaimed, ' Bless me! I am much too early ! ' And he sat down by me for three-quarters of an hour, in which time I persuaded him that his shoes were far too much worn to be worth mending any more, and that he should have a new pair, which, afterward, I made."

" I do not believe it is right for you to do that," said Arla ; " but even if you think so, there is no reason why your clock should go wrong at night, when so many people can hear it because of the stillness."

" Ah, me!" said the cobbler, " I do not object to the clock being as right as you please in the night; but when my day's work is done, I am in such a hurry to go home to my supper that I often forget to put the clock right, or to set it going if it is stopped. But so many things stop at night—such as the day itself—and so many things then go wrong—such as the ways of evil-minded people—that I think you truly ought to pardon my poor clock."

"Then you will not consent," said Arla, "to make it go right?"

"I will do that with all cheerfulness," answered the cobbler, pulling out a pair of waxed-ends with a great jerk, "as soon as I can make myself go right. The most important thing should always be done first; and, surely, I am more important than a clock!" And he smiled with great good-humor.

Arla knew that it would be of no use to stand there any longer and talk with this cobbler. Turning to go, she said:

"When I bring you shoes to mend, you shall finish them by my clock, and not by yours."

"That will I, my good little Arla," said the cobbler, heartily. "They shall be finished by any clock in town, and five minutes before the hour, or no payment."

Arla now walked on until she came to the bridge over the river. It was a long, covered bridge, and by the entrance sat the bridge-keeper.

"Do you know, sir," said she, "that the clock at this end of your bridge does not keep the same time as the one at the other end? They are not so very different, but I have noticed that this one is always done striking at least two minutes before the other begins."

The bridge-keeper looked at her with one eye, which was all he had.

"You are as wrong as anybody can be," said he. "I do not say anything about the striking, because my ears are not now good enough to hear the clock at the other end when I am near this one; but I know they both keep the same time. I have often looked at this clock and have then walked to the other end of the bridge, and have found that the clock there was exactly like it."

Arla looked at the poor old man, whose legs were warmly swaddled on account of his rheumatism, and said:

"But it must take you a good while to walk to the other end of the bridge."

"Out upon you!" cried the bridge-keeper. "I am not so old as that yet! I can walk there in no time!"

Arla now crossed the bridge and went a short distance along a country road until she came to the great stone house known as Vougereau. This belonged to a rich family who seldom came there, and the place was in charge of an elderly man who was the brother of Arla's mother. When his niece was shown into a room on the ground floor, which served for his parlor and his office, he was very glad to see

her ; and while Arla was having something to eat and drink after her walk, the two had a pleasant chat.

"I came this time, Uncle Anton," she said, "not only to see you, but to tell you that the great clock in your tower does not keep good time."

Uncle Anton looked at her a little surprised.

"How do you know that, my dear ? " he said.

Then Arla told him how she had lain awake in the early morning, and had heard the striking of the different clocks. "If you wish to make it right," said she, "I can give you the proper time, for I have brought my own little clock with me."

She was about to take her rose-clock out of her basket, when her uncle motioned to her not to do so.

"Let me tell you something," said he. "The altering of the time of day, which you speak of so lightly, is a very serious matter, which should be considered with all gravity. If you set back a clock, even as little as ten minutes, you add that much to the time that has passed. The hour which has just gone by has been made seventy minutes long. Now, no human being has the right to add anything to the past, nor to make hours longer than they were orig-

inally made. And, on the other hand, if you set a clock forward even so little as ten minutes, you take away that much from the future, and you make the coming hour only fifty minutes long. Now, no human being has a right to take anything away from the future, or to make the hours shorter than they were intended to be. I desire, my dear niece, that you will earnestly think over what I have said, and I am sure that you will then see for yourself how unwise it would be to trifle with the length of the hours which make up our day. And now, Arla, let us talk of other things."

And so they talked of other things until Arla thought it was time to go. She saw there was something wrong in her uncle's reasoning, although she could not tell exactly what it was, and thinking about it, she slowly returned to the town. As she approached the house of the little old lady with white hair, she concluded to stop and speak to her about her clock. "She will surely be willing to alter that," said Arla, "for it is so very much out of the way."

The old lady knew who Arla was, and received her very kindly; but when she heard why the young girl had come to her, she flew into a passion.

"Never, since I was born," she said "have I

been spoken to like this! My great-grandfather lived in this house before me; that clock was good enough for him! My grandfather lived in this house before me; that clock was good enough for him! My father and mother lived in this house before me; that clock was good enough for them! I was born in this house, have always lived in it, and expect to die in it; that clock is good enough for me! I heard its strokes when I was but a little child, I hope to hear them at my last hour; and sooner than raise my hand against the clock of my ancestors, and the clock of my whole life, I would cut off that hand!"

Some tears came into Arla's eyes; she was a little frightened. "I hope you will pardon me, good madam," she said, "for, truly, I did not wish to offend you. Nor did I think that your clock is not a good one. I only meant that you should make it better; it is nearly an hour out of the way."

The sight of Arla's tears cooled the anger of the little old lady with white hair. "Child," she said, "you do not know what you are talking about, and I forgive you. But remember this: never ask persons as old as I am to alter the principles which have always made clear to them what they should do, or the clocks

which have always told them when they should do it."

And, kissing Arla, she bade her good-by.

"Principles may last a great while without altering," thought Arla, as she went away, "but I am sure it is very different with clocks."

The poor girl now felt a good deal discouraged.

"The people don't seem to care whether their clocks are right or not," she said to herself, "and if they don't care, I am sure it is of no use for me to tell them about it. If even one clock could be made to go properly, it might help to make the people of Rondaine care to know exactly what time it is. Now, there is that iron donkey. If he would but kick at the right hour it would be an excellent thing, for he kicks so hard that he is heard all over the town."

Determined to make this one more effort, Arla walked quickly to the town-building, at the top of which was the clock with the iron donkey. This building was a sort of museum; it had a great many curious things in it, and it was in charge of a very ingenious man, who was learned and skilful in various ways.

When Arla had informed the superintendent of the museum why she had come to him, he

did not laugh at her nor did he get angry. He was accustomed to giving earnest consideration to matters of this sort, and he listened attentively to all that Arla had to say.

"You must know," he said, "that our iron donkey is a very complicated piece of mechanism. Not only must he kick out the hours, but five minutes before doing so he must turn his head around and look at the bell behind him; and then, when he has done kicking, he must put his head back into its former position. All this action requires a great many wheels and cogs and springs and levers, and these cannot be made to move with absolute regularity. When it is cold, some of his works contract; and when it is warm, they expand; and there are other reasons why he is very likely to lose or gain time. At noon, on every bright day, I set him right, being able to get the correct time from a sun-dial which stands in the court-yard. But his works—which I am sorry to say are not well made—are sure to get a great deal out of the way before I set him again."

"Then, if there are several cloudy or rainy days together, he goes very wrong indeed," said Arla.

"Yes, he truly does," replied the superintendent, "and I am sorry for it. But there is no

way to help it except for me to make him all over again at my own expense, and that is something I cannot afford to do. The clock belongs to the town, and I am sure the citizens will not be willing to spend the money necessary for a new donkey-clock; for, so far as I know, every person but yourself is perfectly satisfied with this one."

"I suppose so," said Arla, with a sigh; "but it really is a great pity that every striking-clock in Rondaine should be wrong!"

"But how do you know they are all wrong?" asked the superintendent.

"Oh, that is easy enough," said Arla. "When I lie awake in the early morning, when all else is very still, I listen to their striking, and then I look at my own rose-clock to see what time it really is."

"Your rose-clock?" said the superintendent.

"This is it," said Arla, opening her basket and taking out her little clock.

The superintendent took it into his hands and looked at it attentively, both outside and inside. And then, still holding it, he stepped out into the court-yard. When in a few moments he returned, he said:

"I have compared your clock with my sun-

dial, and find that it is ten minutes slow. I also see that, like the donkey-clock, its works are not adjusted in such a way as to be unaffected by heat and cold."

"My — clock — ten — minutes — slow!" exclaimed Arla, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes," said the superintendent, "that is the case to-day, and on some days it is, probably, a great deal too fast. Such a clock as this—which is a very ingenious and beautiful one—ought frequently to be compared with a sundial or other correct time-keeper, and set to the proper hour. I see it requires a peculiar key with which to set it. Have you brought this with you?"

"No, sir," said Arla; "I did not suppose it would be needed."

"Well, then," said the superintendent, "you can set it forward ten minutes when you reach home; and if to-morrow morning you compare the other clocks with it, I think you will find that not all of them are wrong."

Arla sat quiet for a moment, and then she said: "I think I shall not care any more to compare the clocks of Rondaine with my little rose-clock. If the people are satisfied with their own clocks, whether they are fast or slow, and do not care to know exactly when Christ-

mas Day begins, I can do nobody any good by listening to the different strikings and then looking at my own little clock, with a night-lamp by it."

"Especially," said the superintendent, with a smile, "when you are not sure that your rose-clock is right. But if you bring here your little clock and your key on any day when the sun is shining, I will set it to the time shadowed on the sun-dial, or show you how to do it yourself."

"Thank you very much," said Arla, and she took her leave.

As she walked home, she lifted the lid of her basket and looked at her little rose-clock. "To think of it!" she said. "That you should be sometimes too fast and sometimes too slow! And, worse than that, to think that some of the other clocks have been right and you have been wrong! But I do not feel like altering you to-day. If you go fast sometimes, and slow sometimes, you must be right sometimes, and one of these days, when I take you to be compared with the sun-dial, perhaps you will not have to be altered so much."

Arla went to bed that night quite tired with her long walks, and when she awoke it was broad daylight. "I do not know," she said to

herself, "exactly when Christmas began, but I am very sure that the happy day is here."

"Do you lie awake in the morning as much as you used to?" asked Arla's mother, a few weeks after the Christmas holidays.

"No, mother dear," said Arla; "I now sleep with one of my windows shut, and I am no longer awakened by that chilly feeling which used to come to me in the early morning, when I would draw the bed-covers close about me and think how wrong were the clocks of Rondaine."

And the little rose-clock never went to be compared with the sun-dial. "Perhaps you are right now," Arla would say to her clock each day when the sun shone, "and I will not take you until some time when I feel very sure that you are wrong."

THE GRIFFIN AND THE MINOR CANON

OVER the great door of an old, old church which stood in a quiet town of a far-away land there was carved in stone the figure of a large griffin. The old-time sculptor had done his work with great care, but the image he had made was not a pleasant one to look at. It had a large head, with enormous open mouth and savage teeth; from its back arose great wings, armed with sharp hooks and prongs; it had stout legs in front, with projecting claws; but there were no legs behind,—the body running out into a long and powerful tail, finished off at the end with a barbed point. This tail was coiled up under him, the end sticking up just back of his wings.

The sculptor, or the people who had ordered this stone figure, had evidently been very much pleased with it, for little copies of it, also in stone, had been placed here and there along the sides of the church, not very far from the

ground, so that people could easily look at them, and ponder on their curious forms. There were a great many other sculptures on the outside of this church—saints, martyrs, grotesque heads of men, beasts, and birds, as well as those of other creatures which cannot be named, because nobody knows exactly what they were; but none were so curious and interesting as the great griffin over the door, and the little griffins on the sides of the church.

A long, long distance from the town, in the midst of dreadful wilds scarcely known to man, there dwelt the Griffin whose image had been put up over the church-door. In some way or other, the old-time sculptor had seen him and afterward, to the best of his memory, had copied his figure in stone.

The Griffin had never known this, until, hundreds of years afterward, he heard from a bird, from a wild animal, or in some manner which it is not now easy to find out, that there was a likeness of him on the old church in the distant town.

Now, this Griffin had no idea how he looked. He had never seen a mirror, and the streams where he lived were so turbulent and violent that a quiet piece of water, which would reflect the image of any thing looking into it, could

not be found. Being, as far as could be known, the very last of his race, he had never seen another griffin. Therefore it was that, when he heard of this stone image of himself, he became very anxious to know what he looked like, and at last he determined to go to the old church, and see for himself what manner of being he was.

So he started off from the dreadful wilds, and flew on and on until he came to the countries inhabited by men, where his appearance in the air created great consternation; but he alighted nowhere, keeping up a steady flight until he reached the suburbs of the town which had his image on its church. Here, late in the afternoon, he alighted in a green meadow by the side of a brook, and stretched himself on the grass to rest. His great wings were tired, for he had not made such a long flight in a century, or more.

The news of his coming spread quickly over the town, and the people, frightened nearly out of their wits by the arrival of so strange a visitor, fled into their houses, and shut themselves up. The Griffin called loudly for some one to come to him; but the more he called, the more afraid the people were to show themselves. At length he saw two laborers hurry-

ing to their homes through the fields, and in a terrible voice he commanded them to stop. Not daring to disobey, the men stood, trembling.

“What is the matter with you all?” cried the Griffin. “Is there not a man in your town who is brave enough to speak to me?”

“I think,” said one of the laborers, his voice shaking so that his words could hardly be understood, “that—perhaps—the Minor Canon—would come.”

“Go, call him, then!” said the Griffin; “I want to see him.”

The Minor Canon, who was an assistant in the old church, had just finished the afternoon services, and was coming out of a side door, with three aged women who had formed the week-day congregation. He was a young man of a kind disposition, and very anxious to do good to the people of the town. Apart from his duties in the church, where he conducted services every week-day, he visited the sick and the poor, counselled and assisted persons who were in trouble, and taught a school composed entirely of the bad children in the town with whom nobody else would have anything to do. Whenever the people wanted something difficult done for them, they always went

to the Minor Canon. Thus it was that the laborer thought of the young priest when he found that someone must come and speak to the Griffin.

The Minor Canon had not heard of the strange event, which was known to the whole town except himself and the three old women, and when he was informed of it, and was told that the Griffin had asked to see him, he was greatly amazed and frightened.

"Me!" he exclaimed. "He has never heard of me! What should he want with *me*?"

"Oh! you must go instantly!" cried the two men. "He is very angry now because he has been kept waiting so long; and nobody knows what may happen if you don't hurry to him."

The poor Minor Canon would rather have had his hand cut off than go out to meet an angry Griffin; but he felt that it was his duty to go, for it would be a woful thing if injury should come to the people of the town because he was not brave enough to obey the summons of the Griffin. So, pale and frightened, he started off.

"Well," said the Griffin, as soon as the young man came near, "I am glad to see that there is someone who has the courage to come to me."

The Minor Canon did not feel very brave, but he bowed his head.

"Is this the town," said the Griffin, "where there is a church with a likeness of myself over one of the doors?"

The Minor Canon looked at the frightful creature before him and saw that it was, without doubt, exactly like the stone image on the church. "Yes," he said, "you are right."

"Well, then," said the Griffin, "will you take me to it? I wish very much to see it."

The Minor Canon instantly thought that if the Griffin entered the town without the people's knowing what he came for, some of them would probably be frightened to death, and so he sought to gain time to prepare their minds.

"It is growing dark, now," he said, very much afraid, as he spoke, that his words might enrage the Griffin, "and objects on the front of the church cannot be seen clearly. It will be better to wait until morning, if you wish to get a good view of the stone image of yourself."

"That will suit me very well," said the Griffin. "I see you are a man of good sense. I am tired, and I will take a nap here on this soft grass, while I cool my tail in the little stream that runs near me. The end of my tail gets red-hot when I am angry or excited, and it is

quite warm now. So you may go ; but be sure and come early to-morrow morning, and show me the way to the church."

The Minor Canon was glad enough to take his leave, and hurried into the town. In front of the church he found a great many people assembled to hear his report of his talk with the Griffin. When they found that he had not come to spread ruin, but simply to see his stony likeness on the church, they showed neither relief nor gratification, but began to upbraid the Minor Canon for consenting to conduct the creature into the town.

"What could I do?" cried the young man. "If I should not bring him he would come himself and, perhaps, end by setting fire to the town with his red-hot tail."

Still the people were not satisfied, and a great many plans were proposed to prevent the Griffin from coming into the town. Some elderly persons urged that the young men should go out and kill him ; but the young men scoffed at such a ridiculous idea.

Then some one said that it would be a good thing to destroy the stone image so that the Griffin would have no excuse for entering the town ; and this plan was received with such favor that many of the people ran for hammers,

chisels, and crowbars, with which to tear down and break up the stone griffin. But the Minor Canon resisted this plan with all the strength of his mind and body. He assured the people that this action would enrage the Griffin beyond measure, for it would be impossible to conceal from him that his image had been destroyed during the night. But the people were so determined to break up the stone griffin that the Minor Canon saw that there was nothing for him to do but to stay there and protect it. All night he walked up and down in front of the church-door, keeping away the men who brought ladders, by which they might mount to the great stone griffin, and knock it to pieces with their hammers and crowbars. After many hours the people were obliged to give up their attempts, and went home to sleep; but the Minor Canon remained at his post till early morning, and then he hurried away to the field where he had left the Griffin.

The monster had just awakened, and rising to his forelegs and shaking himself he said that he was ready to go into the town. The Minor Canon, therefore, walked back, the Griffin flying slowly through the air, at a short distance above the head of his guide. Not a person was to be seen in the streets, and they

went directly to the front of the church, where the Minor Canon pointed out the stone griffin.

The real Griffin settled down in the little square before the church and gazed earnestly at his sculptured likeness. For a long time he looked at it. First he put his head on one side, and then he put it on the other ; then he shut his right eye and gazed with his left, after which he shut his left eye and gazed with his right. Then he moved a little to one side and looked at the image, then he moved the other way. After a while he said to the Minor Canon, who had been standing by all this time :

“ It is, it must be, an excellent likeness ! That breadth between the eyes, that expansive forehead, those massive jaws ! I feel that it must resemble me. If there is any fault to find with it, it is that the neck seems a little stiff. But that is nothing. It is an admirable likeness—admirable ! ”

The Griffin sat looking at his image all the morning and all the afternoon. The Minor Canon had been afraid to go away and leave him, and had hoped all through the day that he would soon be satisfied with his inspection and fly away home. But by evening the poor young man was very tired, and felt that he must eat

and sleep. He frankly said this to the Griffin, and asked him if he would not like something to eat. He said this because he felt obliged in politeness to do so; but as soon as he had spoken the words, he was seized with dread lest the monster should demand half a dozen babies, or some tempting repast of that kind.

"Oh, no," said the Griffin; "I never eat between the equinoxes. At the vernal and at the autumnal equinox I take a good meal, and that lasts me for half a year. I am extremely regular in my habits, and do not think it healthful to eat at odd times. But if you need food, go and get it, and I will return to the soft grass where I slept last night and take another nap."

The next day the Griffin came again to the little square before the church, and remained there until evening, steadfastly regarding the stone griffin over the door. The Minor Canon came once or twice to look at him, and the Griffin seemed very glad to see him; but the young clergyman could not stay as he had done before, for he had many duties to perform. Nobody went to the church, but the people came to the Minor Canon's house, and anxiously asked him how long the Griffin was going to stay.

"I do not know," he answered, "but I think

he will soon be satisfied with regarding his stone likeness, and then he will go away."

But the Griffin did not go away. Morning after morning he came to the church; but after a time he did not stay there all day. He seemed to have taken a great fancy to the Minor Canon, and followed him about as he worked. He would wait for him at the side door of the church, for the Minor Canon held services every day, morning and evening, though nobody came now. "If any one should come," he said to himself, "I must be found at my post." When the young man came out, the Griffin would accompany him in his visits to the sick and the poor, and would often look into the windows of the school-house where the Minor Canon was teaching his unruly scholars. All the other schools were closed, but the parents of the Minor Canon's scholars forced them to go to school, because they were so bad they could not endure them all day at home—Griffin or no Griffin. But it must be said they generally behaved very well when that great monster sat up on his tail and looked in at the school-room window.

When it was found that the Griffin showed no sign of going away, all the people who were able to do so left the town. The canons and

the higher officers of the church had fled away during the first day of the Griffin's visit, leaving behind only the Minor Canon and some of the men who opened the doors and swept the church. All the citizens who could afford it shut up their houses and travelled to distant parts, and only the working-people and the poor were left behind. After some days these ventured to go about and attend to their business, for if they did not work they would starve. They were getting a little used to seeing the Griffin; and having been told that he did not eat between equinoxes, they did not feel so much afraid of him as before.

Day by day the Griffin became more and more attached to the Minor Canon. He kept near him a great part of the time, and often spent the night in front of the little house where the young clergyman lived alone. This strange companionship was often burdensome to the Minor Canon; but, on the other hand, he could not deny that he derived a great deal of benefit and instruction from it. The Griffin had lived for hundreds of years, and had seen much, and he told the Minor Canon many wonderful things.

"It is like reading an old book," said the young clergyman to himself; "but how many

books I would have had to read before I would have found out what the Griffin has told me about the earth, the air, the water, about minerals, and metals, and growing things, and all the wonders of the world!"

Thus the summer went on, and drew toward its close. And now the people of the town began to be very much troubled again.

"It will not be long," they said, "before the autumnal equinox is here, and then that monster will want to eat. He will be dreadfully hungry, for he has taken so much exercise since his last meal. He will devour our children. Without doubt, he will eat them all. What is to be done?"

To this question no one could give an answer, but all agreed that the Griffin must not be allowed to remain until the approaching equinox. After talking over the matter a great deal, a crowd of the people went to the Minor Canon at a time when the Griffin was not with him.

"It is all your fault," they said, "that that monster is among us. You brought him here, and you ought to see that he goes away. It is only on your account that he stays here at all; for, although he visits his image every day, he is with you the greater part of the time. If you were not here, he would not stay. It is

your duty to go away, and then he will follow you, and we shall be free from the dreadful danger which hangs over us."

"Go away!" cried the Minor Canon, greatly grieved at being spoken to in such a way. "Where shall I go? If I go to some other town, shall I not take this trouble there? Have I a right to do that?"

"No," said the people, "you must not go to any other town. There is no town far enough away. You must go to the dreadful wilds where the Griffin lives; and then he will follow you and stay there."

They did not say whether or not they expected the Minor Canon to stay there also, and he did not ask them anything about it. He bowed his head, and went into his house to think. The more he thought, the more clear it became to his mind that it was his duty to go away, and thus free the town from the presence of the Griffin.

That evening he packed a leathern bag full of bread and meat, and early the next morning he set out on his journey to the dreadful wilds. It was a long, weary, and doleful journey, especially after he had gone beyond the habitations of men; but the Minor Canon kept on bravely, and never faltered.

The way was longer than he had expected, and his provisions soon grew so scanty that he was obliged to eat but a little every day ; but he kept up his courage, and pressed on, and, after many days of toilsome travel, he reached the dreadful wilds.

When the Griffin found that the Minor Canon had left the town he seemed sorry, but showed no desire to go and look for him. After a few days had passed he became much annoyed, and asked some of the people where the Minor Canon had gone. But, although the citizens had been so anxious that the young clergyman should go to the dreadful wilds, thinking that the Griffin would immediately follow him, they were now afraid to mention the Minor Canon's destination, for the monster seemed angry already, and if he should suspect their trick he would, doubtless, become very much enraged. So every one said he did not know, and the Griffin wandered about disconsolate. One morning he looked into the Minor Canon's school-house, which was always empty now, and thought that it was a shame that everything should suffer on account of the young man's absence.

"It does not matter so much about the church," he said, "for nobody went there ; but

it is a pity about the school. I think I will teach it myself until he returns."

It was the hour for opening the school, and the Griffin went inside and pulled the rope which rang the school-bell. Some of the children who heard the bell ran in to see what was the matter, supposing it to be a joke of one of their companions; but when they saw the Griffin they stood astonished and scared.

"Go tell the other scholars," said the monster, "that school is about to open, and that if they are not all here in ten minutes I shall come after them."

In seven minutes every scholar was in place.

Never was seen such an orderly school. Not a boy or girl moved or uttered a whisper. The Griffin climbed into the master's seat, his wide wings spread on each side of him, because he could not lean back in his chair while they stuck out behind, and his great tail coiled around, in front of the desk, the barbed end sticking up, ready to tap any boy or girl who might misbehave.

The Griffin now addressed the scholars, telling them that he intended to teach them while their master was away. In speaking he tried to imitate, as far as possible, the mild and gentle tones of the Minor Canon; but it must

be admitted that in this he was not very successful. He had paid a good deal of attention to the studies of the school, and he determined not to try to teach them anything new, but to review them in what they had been studying; so he called up the various classes, and questioned them upon their previous lessons. The children racked their brains to remember what they had learned. They were so afraid of the Griffin's displeasure that they recited as they had never recited before. One of the boys, far down in his class, answered so well that the Griffin was astonished.

"I should think you would be at the head," said he. "I am sure you have never been in the habit of reciting so well. Why is this?"

"Because I did not choose to take the trouble," said the boy, trembling in his boots. He felt obliged to speak the truth, for all the children thought that the great eyes of the Griffin could see right through them, and that he would know when they told a falsehood.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said the Griffin. "Go down to the very tail of the class; and if you are not at the head in two days, I shall know the reason why."

The next afternoon this boy was Number One.

It was astonishing how much these children

now learned of what they had been studying. It was as if they had been educated over again. The Griffin used no severity toward them, but there was a look about him which made them unwilling to go to bed until they were sure they knew their lessons for the next day.

The Griffin now thought that he ought to visit the sick and the poor; and he began to go about the town for this purpose. The effect upon the sick was miraculous. All, except those who were very ill indeed, jumped from their beds when they heard he was coming, and declared themselves quite well. To those who could not get up he gave herbs and roots, which none of them had ever before thought of as medicines, but which the Griffin had seen used in various parts of the world; and most of them recovered. But, for all that, they afterward said that, no matter what happened to them, they hoped that they should never again have such a doctor coming to their bedsides, feeling their pulses and looking at their tongues.

As for the poor, they seemed to have utterly disappeared. All those who had depended upon charity for their daily bread were now at work in some way or other; many of them offering to do odd jobs for their neighbors just

for the sake of their meals—a thing which before had been seldom heard of in the town. The Griffin could find no one who needed his assistance.

The summer had now passed, and the autumnal equinox was rapidly approaching. The citizens were in a state of great alarm and anxiety. The Griffin showed no signs of going away, but seemed to have settled himself permanently among them. In a short time the day for his semi-annual meal would arrive, and then what would happen? The monster would certainly be very hungry, and would devour all their children.

Now they greatly regretted and lamented that they had sent away the Minor Canon; he was the only one on whom they could have depended in this trouble, for he could talk freely with the Griffin, and so find out what could be done. But it would not do to be inactive. Some step must be taken immediately. A meeting of the citizens was called, and two old men were appointed to go and talk to the Griffin. They were instructed to offer to prepare a splendid dinner for him on equinox day—one which would entirely satisfy his hunger. They would offer him the fattest mutton, the most tender beef, fish, and game of various

sorts, and anything of the kind that he might fancy. If none of these suited, they were to mention that there was an orphan asylum in the next town.

"Anything would be better," said the citizens, "than to have our dear children devoured."

The old men went to the Griffin; but their propositions were not received with favor.

"From what I have seen of the people of this town," said the monster, "I do not think I could relish anything which was prepared by them. They appear to be all cowards, and, therefore, mean and selfish. As for eating one of them, old or young, I could not think of it for a moment. In fact, there was only one creature in the whole place for whom I could have had any appetite, and that is the Minor Canon, who has gone away. He was brave, and good, and honest, and I think I should have relished him."

"Ah!" said one of the old men very politely, "in that case I wish we had not sent him to the dreadful wilds!"

"What!" cried the Griffin. "What do you mean? Explain instantly what you are talking about!"

The old man, terribly frightened at what he

had said, was obliged to tell how the Minor Canon had been sent away by the people, in the hope that the Griffin might be induced to follow him.

When the monster heard this he became furiously angry. He dashed away from the old men, and, spreading his wings, flew backward and forward over the town. He was so much excited that his tail became red-hot, and glowed like a meteor against the evening sky. When at last he settled down in the little field where he usually rested, and thrust his tail into the brook, the steam arose like a cloud, and the water of the stream ran hot through the town. The citizens were greatly frightened, and bitterly blamed the old man for telling about the Minor Canon.

"It is plain," they said, "that the Griffin intended at last to go and look for him, and we should have been saved. Now who can tell what misery you have brought upon us."

The Griffin did not remain long in the little field. As soon as his tail was cool he flew to the town-hall and rang the bell. The citizens knew that they were expected to come there; and although they were afraid to go, they were still more afraid to stay away; and they crowded into the hall. The Griffin was on the plat-

form at one end, flapping his wings and walking up and down, and the end of his tail was still so warm that it slightly scorched the boards as he dragged it after him.

When everybody who was able to come was there, the Griffin stood still and addressed the meeting.

"I have had a very low opinion of you," he said, "ever since I discovered what cowards you are, but I had no idea that you were so ungrateful, selfish, and cruel as I now find you to be. Here was your Minor Canon, who labored day and night for your good, and thought of nothing else but how he might benefit you and make you happy ; and as soon as you imagine yourselves threatened with a danger—for well I know you are dreadfully afraid of me—you send him off, caring not whether he returns or perishes, hoping thereby to save yourselves. Now, I had conceived a great liking for that young man, and had intended, in a day or two, to go and look him up. But I have changed my mind about him. I shall go and find him, but I shall send him back here to live among you, and I intend that he shall enjoy the reward of his labor and his sacrifices.

"Go, some of you, to the officers of the church, who so cowardly ran away when I first

came here, and tell them never to return to this town under penalty of death. And if, when your Minor Canon comes back to you, you do not bow yourselves before him, put him in the highest place among you, and serve and honor him all his life, beware of my terrible vengeance! There were only two good things in this town: the Minor Canon and the stone image of myself over your church-door. One of these you have sent away, and the other I shall carry away myself."

With these words he dismissed the meeting, and it was time, for the end of his tail had become so hot that there was danger of its setting fire to the building.

The next morning the Griffin came to the church, and tearing the stone image of himself from its fastenings over the great door, he grasped it with his powerful forelegs and flew up into the air. Then, after hovering over the town for a moment, he gave his tail an angry shake and took up his flight to the dreadful wilds. When he reached this desolate region, he set the stone griffin upon a ledge of a rock which rose in front of the dismal cave he called his home. There the image occupied a position somewhat similar to that it had had over the church-door; and the Griffin, panting with the

exertion of carrying such an enormous load to so great a distance, lay down upon the ground and regarded it with much satisfaction. When he felt somewhat rested he went to look for the Minor Canon. He found the young man, weak and half-starved, lying under the shadow of a rock. After picking him up and carrying him to his cave, the Griffin flew away to a distant marsh, where he procured some roots and herbs which he well knew were strengthening and beneficial to man, though he had never tasted them himself. After eating these the Minor Canon was greatly revived, and sat up and listened while the Griffin told him what had happened in the town.

"Do you know," said the monster, when he had finished, "that I have had, and still have, a great liking for you?"

"I am very glad to hear it," said the Minor Canon, with his usual politeness.

"I am not at all sure that you would be," said the Griffin, "if you thoroughly understood the state of the case; but we will not consider that now. If some things were different, other things would be otherwise. I have been so enraged by discovering the manner in which you have been treated that I have determined that you shall at last enjoy the rewards and honors

to which you are entitled. Lie down and have a good sleep, and then I will take you back to the town."

As he heard these words, a look of trouble came over the young man's face.

"You need not give yourself any anxiety," said the Griffin, "about my return to the town. I shall not remain there. Now that I have that admirable likeness of myself in front of my cave, where I can sit at my leisure, and gaze upon its noble features, I have no wish to see that abode of cowardly and selfish people."

The Minor Canon, relieved from his fears, lay back, and dropped into a doze; and when he was sound asleep the Griffin took him up, and carried him back to the town. He arrived just before daybreak, and, putting the young man gently on the grass in the little field where he himself used to rest, the monster, without having been seen by any of the people, flew back to his home.

When the Minor Canon made his appearance in the morning among the citizens, the enthusiasm and cordiality with which he was received were truly wonderful. He was taken to a house which had been occupied by one of the banished high officers of the place, and everyone was anxious to do all that could be done for

his health and comfort. The people crowded into the church when he held services, so that the three old women who used to be his week-day congregation could not get to the best seats, which they had always been in the habit of taking; and the parents of the bad children determined to reform them at home, in order that he might be spared the trouble of keeping up his former school. The Minor Canon was appointed to the highest office of the old church, and before he died he became a bishop.

During the first years after his return from the dreadful wilds the people of the town looked up to him as a man to whom they were bound to do honor and reverence; but they often, also, looked up to the sky to see if there were any signs of the Griffin coming back. However, in the course of time, they learned to honor and reverence their former Minor Canon without the fear of being punished if they did not do so.

But they need never have been afraid of the Griffin. The autumnal equinox day came round, and the monster ate nothing. If he could not have the Minor Canon, he did not care for anything. So, lying down, with his eyes fixed upon the great stone griffin, he gradually declined, and died. It was a good thing

for some of the people of the town that they did not know this.

If you should ever visit the old town, you would still see the little griffins on the sides of the church ; but the great stone griffin that was over the door is gone.

THE CHRISTMAS TRUANTS

CHRISTMAS was coming, a long time ago, and the boys in a certain far-away school were talking and thinking about it. Eleven of these youngsters, who were all great friends, and generally kept together, whether at work or play, held a secret meeting, at which they resolved that they were tired of the ordinary ways of spending Christmas.

"We are bored to death," said one of the older boys, "with Christmas trees, with Christmas games, with Christmas carols, and with the hanging-up of stockings on Christmas Eve. Such things may do very well for children, but we have grown out of them."

"That's true!" cried the others. "We've grown out of that kind of nonsense."

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the smallest boy of all, who was generally known as Tomtit. "We've grown out of that."

"Of course," said the biggest boy, who was called by his companions Old Pluck, because



THEY WERE MARCHED AWAY TO THE ROBBER'S CAVE.

he had never been found to be afraid of anything, "there will be this Christmas childishness at the school, just as there has been always; and I propose that, instead of staying here and submitting to it, we run away, and have a Christmas to suit ourselves."

"Hurrah!" cried the other boys. "That's what we shall do. Have a Christmas to suit ourselves."

Having made up their minds to this, these eleven boys, on the afternoon of the next day but one to Christmas, ran away from school, in order that they might find a place where they would be free to celebrate the great holiday in whatever way they pleased. They walked as fast as they could, little Tomtit keeping up bravely in the rear, although he was obliged to run almost as much as he walked, until they were at a long distance from the school. Night was now coming on, and Old Pluck called a halt.

"Boys," said he, "we will camp at the edge of that forest, and those of you who have brought bows and arrows had better look about and see if you can't shoot some birds and rabbits for our supper. The unarmed members must gather wood to make a camp-fire. But if you are tired, Tomtit, you needn't do anything."

"Tired!" exclaimed the little fellow, standing up very straight and throwing out his chest; "I should like to know why I should be tired. I'll go and bring some logs."

Tomtit was very anxious to be considered just as strong and active as the other boys. Every morning he used to get one of his companions to feel the muscles of his arms, to see if they had not increased in size since the day before.

The camp-fire was burning brightly when the boys with the bows and arrows returned, stating that they had found it rather too late in the day for game, and that it would be better to postpone the shooting of birds and rabbits till the next morning. Old Pluck then asked the members of his little company what provisions they had brought with them; and it was found that no one except Tomtit had thought of bringing anything. He had in his coat pocket a luncheon of bread and meat. It was thereupon ordered that Tomtit's luncheon should be divided into eleven portions, and the little fellow was given a knife with which to cut it up.

It was at this time that there came through the forest a band of robbers—five men and a chief. These men, on their way to their castle,

had been talking about the approach of Christmas.

"I am getting very tired," said the chief, "of the wild revelries with which on great occasions we make our castle ring. It would be a most agreeable relief, methinks, if we could celebrate the coming Christmas as ordinary people do. The trouble is we don't know how."

"You speak well," replied one of his followers. "We would be glad enough to have the ordinary Christmas festivities if we did but know how such things are managed."

The conversation was cut short at this point by the discovery of a camp-fire at the edge of the wood. Instantly every robber crouched close to the ground, and crept silently to the spot where the boys were gathered around Tomtit, watching him as he cut up his luncheon.

In a few moments the chief gave a whistle, and then the robbers rushed out, and each of the men seized two of the larger boys, while the chief stooped down and grasped Tomtit by the collar. Some of the boys kicked and scuffled a great deal; but this was of no use, and they were all marched away to the robbers' castle, little Tomtit feeling very proud

that it took a whole man to hold him by the collar.

When they reached the castle the boys were shut up in a large room, where they were soon provided with a plentiful supper. Having finished their meal, they were conducted to the great hall of the castle, where the robber chief sat in his chair of state, a huge fire blazing upon the hearth, while suits of armor, glittering weapons, and trophies of many kinds were hung upon the walls.

The boys were now ordered to tell their story; and when Old Pluck had finished it, the chief addressed his captives thus: "I am sure that you young fellows could never have imagined the pleasure you were going to give to me when you determined to run away from school at this happy season.

"My men and myself have a fancy for a Christmas like that of other people. We want a Christmas tree, Christmas carols and games, and all that sort of festivity. We know nothing about these things ourselves, and were wondering how we could manage to have the kind of Christmas we want. But now that we have you boys with us, it will all be simple and easy enough. You shall celebrate Christmas for us in the manner to which you have always been

accustomed. We will provide you with everything that is necessary, and we will have a good old school-and-home Christmas. You shall even hang up your stockings, and I will see to it that Santa Claus for the first time visits this castle. And now, my fine fellows, to bed with you, and to-morrow we will all go to work to prepare for a good old-fashioned Christmas."

The boys were conducted to a large upper room, where they found eleven mattresses spread out upon the floor. They threw themselves upon their beds; but not one of them could close his eyes through thinking of the doleful plight which they were in. They had run away to get rid of the tiresome old Christmas doings, and now they were to go through all those very things just to please a band of robbers. The thought of it was insupportable, and for an hour or two each boy rolled and moaned upon his mattress.

At last Old Pluck spoke. "Boys," he said, "all is now quiet below, and I believe those rascally robbers have gone to bed. Let us wait a little while longer, and then slip downstairs and run away. We can surely find some door or window which we can open; and I, for one, am not willing to stay here and act the

part of a Christmas slave for the pleasure of these bandits."

"No," exclaimed Tomtit, sitting up in bed, so as to expand his chest, "we will never consent to that."

The boys eagerly agreed to Old Pluck's plan, and in about half an hour they quietly arose and stole toward the stairs. The full moon was shining in through the windows, so that they could see perfectly well where they were going. They had gone a short distance down the great staircase, when Old Pluck, who led the way, heard a slight noise behind him. Turning to inquire what this was, he was told it was the cracking of Tomtit's knees.

"Pass the word to Tomtit," he said, in a whisper, "that if he can't keep his knees from cracking he must stay where he is."

Poor little Tomtit, who brought up the rear, was dreadfully troubled when he heard this; but he bravely passed the word back that his knees should not crack any more, and the line moved on.

It was difficult now for Tomtit to take a step, for if he bent his knees they were sure to crack. He tried going downstairs stiff-legged, like a pair of scissors; but this he found almost impossible, so he made up his mind that the

only thing he could do was to slide down the broad banister. He was used to this feat, and he performed it with much dexterity. The banister, however, was very smooth and steep, and he went down much faster than he intended, shooting off at the bottom, and landing on the floor on the broad of his back.

The boys were now in the great hall, and, seeing a light in the adjoining room, they looked into it. There, upon couches made of the skins of wild beasts, they saw the six robbers, fast asleep. A happy thought now came into the mind of Old Pluck. Stepping back, he looked around him, and soon perceived in one corner of the hall a quantity of rich stuffs and other booty, bound up into bundles with heavy cords. Taking out his knife he quickly cut off a number of these cords and gave them to his companions.

"Boys," he then whispered, "I have thought of a splendid plan. Let us bind these robbers hand and foot, and then, instead of doing what they want us to do, we can make them do what we want. That will be ever so much better fun than running away."

"Good!" said the boys. "But suppose they wake up while we are tying them?"

"If we are truly brave," said Old Pluck, "we

must just go ahead, and not think of anything like that."

"Yes, sir," said Tomtit, straightening himself and throwing out his chest, "we mustn't think of anything of that sort."

The little fellow was terribly frightened at the idea of going into that room and tying those big, savage men; but if the other fellows did it, he was bound to do it too.

The boys now softly slipped into the room, and as the robbers slept very soundly, it was not long before they were all securely bound hand and foot, Old Pluck going around himself to see that every cord was well drawn and knotted. Then, motioning to the boys to follow him, he went into the great hall, and there he ordered his companions to arm themselves.

This command was obeyed with delight by the boys. Some took swords, some spears, while others bound around their waists great belts containing daggers and knives. Old Pluck laid hold of a huge battle-axe, while Tomtit clapped on his head the chief's hat, ornamented with eagle plumes, and took into his hand a thin, sharp rapier, the blade of which was quite as long as himself.

When all were ready, the boys reëntered the

other room, and, with their weapons in their hands, stood over the sleeping robbers. Raising his heavy battle-axe high above the head of the chief, Old Pluck called out to him to awake. Instantly every man opened his eyes, and struggled to rise. But when they found their hands and feet were tied, and saw the boys with their swords and spears standing over them, and heard Old Pluck's loud voice ordering them not to move, every robber lay flat on his back, and remained perfectly still.

"Now, then," said Old Pluck to the chief, "if you do not promise that you and your men will obey me for the next two days I will split your head with this axe."

"I am willing to parley with you," said the chief, "and will listen to all you have to say; but for mercy's sake put down that battle-axe. It is too heavy for you, and you will let it drop on me without intending it."

"No," said Old Pluck, steadying the great axe as well as he could, "I will hold it over you until we have made our bargain."

"Speak quickly, then," said the chief, his face turning pale as he looked up at the trembling axe.

"All you have to do," said Old Pluck, "is to promise that you and your men will do every-

thing that we tell you to do to-morrow and next day. You will not find our tasks at all difficult, and it will be only for two days, you know."

"Any sort of a task, if it lasted a year," said the chief, "would be better than having you staggering over me with that battle-axe. I promise without reserve for myself and men."

"Very good," said Old Pluck, letting down his axe as carefully as he could. "And now we will set you free."

The men were untied, and the boys went to bed, and the next morning all breakfasted together in the great hall. When the meal was over the chief pushed back his chair, and addressed the boys.

"Now, then, my young friends," said he, "what is it that you wish me and my men to do?"

Then stood up Old Pluck and said, "We boys, as I told you before, ran away from school because we are tired of the old humdrum Christmas; and nothing better could have happened to us than to get you fine fellows into our power, as we have done. It will be the jolliest thing in the world for us to see you and your band go through all the wild feats and bold exploits which belong to robber life; and

we would like you to begin now, and keep it up all day and to-morrow."

"But what would you have us do?" asked the chief, somewhat surprised.

"I should like to see you sack a village," said Old Pluck. "How would that suit you, boys?"

The boys all declared that they thought that would do very well, to begin with.

The chief turned to his lieutenant and said: "Is there any village round here that has not been recently sacked?"

The lieutenant reflected a moment. "There is Buville," he said. "We haven't been there for six months."

"Very good," said the captain, rising; "we'll sack Buville."

In a short time the robber band, followed by the eleven boys, set out for Buville, a few miles distant. When they came within sight of the village the chief ordered his company to get behind a hedge which ran on one side of the road, and thus stealthily approach the place.

As soon as they were near enough the chief gave a loud whistle, and the whole company rushed wildly into the main street. The robbers flashed their drawn swords in the sunlight

and brandished their spears, while the boys jumped and howled like so many apprentice bandits.

"Buville is ours!" cried the chief. "Come forth, ye base villagers, and pay us tribute."

"Come forth!" yelled little Tomtit. "Surrender, and trib!—I mean, pay tribute."

At this the people began to flock into the street; and presently the principal man of the village appeared, carrying a sheet of paper and pen and ink.

"Good-morning, bold sir," he said, addressing the chief. "And what is it you'll have to-day? Shall we begin with flour? How will two barrels do?"

The chief nodded, and the man wrote down on his paper two barrels of flour.

"Sugar, hams, and eggs, I suppose?" continued the man.

The chief assented, and these were written down.

"Sundry groceries, of course," said he. "And would you care for any rich stuffs?"

"Well, I don't know that we need any just now," said the chief; "but you might throw in enough gold-threaded blue taffeta to make a jerkin for that little codger back there."

"Three-quarters of a yard of blue taffeta,"

wrote the man. And then he looked up and asked: "Anything else to-day?"

"I believe not," said the chief. And then brandishing his sword, he shouted: "Back to your homes, base villagers, and thank your stars that I let ye off so easily."

"Home with ye!" shouted Tomtit, "and keep on star-thanking till we come again."

"You need be in no hurry about sending those things," said the chief to the principal man, as he was about to leave, "except the taf-feta. I'd like to have that to-day."

"Very good," said the other; "I'll send it immediately."

As the robbers and boys departed, the latter were not at all slow to say that they were very much disappointed at what they had seen. It was tamer than a game of football.

"The fact is," said the chief, "these villagers have been sacked so often that the people are used to it, and they just walk out and pay up without making any row about it. It's the easiest way, both for them and for us; but I admit that it is not very exciting."

"I should say not," said Old Pluck. "What I want is 'the wild rush and dash, the clink and the clank, and the jingly-jank, hi-ho!'"

"That's so!" shouted little Tomtit. "'The

clink and the clank, and the jingly-jank, ho-hi!'"

"I think we'll next try a highway robbery," said Old Pluck, "and stop a company of travellers on the road. That must be exciting."

The boys all shouted their assent to this plan, and the robber chief led the way to the nearest high-road.

Here the whole party concealed themselves behind rocks and bushes, and waited patiently for a company of travellers to pass by. It was a long, long time before anybody came, and Tomtit had a sound nap in the shade of a hedge.

At last dust was seen in the distance, and before long five horsemen came riding up. They were all elderly men, and each of them led a mule or a horse, loaded with heavy panniers and packages. With drawn swords and brandished spears the robbers rushed out, followed by the boys, with yells and shouts. Instantly the elderly men stopped and descended from their horses.

"We surrender," said the leader to the robber chief; "but we pray you will not pillage us utterly. We are going to seek a new home for our families, and for the money we get for the sale of these goods we hope to buy the lit-

the land we need. If you take these, you leave us nothing."

The chief turned to Old Pluck, and said: "Well, what shall we do about it? Shall we take their goods?"

"If you set out to do a thing," said Old Pluck, "I don't see why you don't do it. There's no sense in backing down."

"That's so!" cried Tomtit, who had just wakened up, and pushed his way through the hedge. "No backing down. Your money or your lives, travellers. Take notice of that."

"Lead away the horses and mules," said the chief to his men, "and let the travellers go."

As they were leaving the scene of this exploit Old Pluck did not feel altogether easy in his mind. "There used to be a good habit among robbers," he said to the chief, "and that was to give to the poor what they took from the rich. We will go along this road until we meet some really poor people, and we will give them these goods."

The robbers and boys, with the loaded horses and mules, walked along the road for nearly an hour, but met with no poor people. At last the chief declared that it was time to turn and go back to the castle, if they wanted to be there by dinner-time. The boys were very willing

to go to dinner, and the whole party retraced their steps.

When they reached the spot where they had robbed the travellers, they were surprised to see the five elderly men sitting by the roadside, groaning mournfully.

"What, here yet!" cried the chiet. "What's the matter?"

"There is no use going anywhere," sadly replied the leader. "We have no money with which to buy even food to eat, and no goods to sell. We might as well die here as in any other place."

"Boys," exclaimed Old Pluck, after gazing a few moments on the unfortunate group, "I don't believe we will ever find anybody as poor as these travellers now are. Let us give them the goods."

"All right!" shouted the boys. And the loaded horses and mules were delivered to their former owners.

After dinner the boys began to grumble a good deal at the disappointments of the morning.

"We've done nothing yet," cried Old Pluck, "that is half exciting enough, and we are bound to have a good time this afternoon. I go in for burning a town."

"Hurrah!" said the boys. "We'll burn a town!"

"That is a very serious thing," said the chief. "Can't you think of something else?"

Old Pluck looked at him reproachfully. "We want something serious," he said. "What we've had so far is nothing but child's play."

The chief now saw that if he persisted in his objections he would hurt the feelings of the boys, and so he consented to burn a town. A few miles to the south there was a good-sized town, which the chief thought would burn very well, and thither the boys and robbers repaired, carrying blazing torches and fire-brands.

When they reached the town and had made known their purpose the people were filled with alarm. They crowded into the streets and begged the robbers not to burn their houses, their goods, and perhaps themselves and their children.

The chief now took the boys aside, and consulted with them.

"I wish you would consider this matter a little more before you order me to set this town in flames. I am told that there is a magazine filled with gunpowder in the centre of the place,

and there will be a terrible explosion when the fire reaches it."

"Hurrah!" cried the boys; "that will be splendid."

"Many of these citizens will lose their lives," said the chief, "and the rest will be utterly ruined."

"Now, look here," cried Old Pluck, "there's no use of always backing down. I'm tired of it."

"Very well," said the chief, "but you yourselves must inform the people of your decision."

"We'll do that," said Old Pluck. "Tomtit, you go tell those people that the town has got to burn, and there's no use talking any more about it."

"That's so," said Tomtit. "She has got to burn." And with his chest thrown out, and his hands in his pockets, the little fellow boldly advanced to the crowd of people.

As soon as he came near the old men, the women and the children fell on their knees around him, and with tears and lamentations besought him to intercede with the robbers to save their town. Poor little Tomtit was very much moved by their wild grief and despair. Tears came into his eyes, and his little chest

heaved with emotion ; but he kept up a brave heart, and stood true to his companions.

"It's no use," he said, "for you to be blubbering and crying. Your houses have all got to be burned up, and the powder-magazine has got to go off with a big bang, and your furniture and beds will all be burned, and the babies' cradles, and—and—I'm awful sorry for it," and here the tears rolled down his cheeks ; "but we boys have got to stick by each other, and you won't have any homes, and I expect you will all perish—boo-hoo ! But it won't do to back down—boo-hoo-hoo ! And the little babies will die ; but the old thing has got to burn, you know."

"Now, look here, Tomtit," said Old Pluck, who, with the rest of the boys, had drawn near, "don't you be too hard on these people. I say let the town stand."

The boys agreed with one voice. And Tomtit, kicking one of his little legs above his head, shouted in ecstasy : "Yes, sir, let the town stand, babies and all."

At this the women rushed up to the little fellow, and, seizing him in their arms, nearly kissed him to death.

"I'd like to know what we are to do next," sadly remarked Old Pluck.

"I'll tell you," cried Tomtit. "Let the chief steal a bride."

The whole company stopped and looked at Tomtit. "Little boy," said they, "what do you mean?"

"Why, of course," said Tomtit, "I mean for the chief to seize a fair damsel and carry her off on his horse to be his bride, the wild hoofs clattering amid the crags."

"Hoot!" cried all the boys in derision. And the chief said to Tomtit: "Little boy, I know of no fair damsel to steal, and, besides, I do not want a bride."

"It's pretty hard," said Tomtit, wiping his eyes with his little sleeve. "I've done just what you fellows told me to, and now you won't order anything I want to see."

That night the boys ordered the robbers to hold high revels in the great hall. The flowing bowl was passed, and the great flagons were filled high; wild songs were sung, and the welkin was made to ring, as well as the robbers could do it, with jovial glee. The boys watched the proceedings for some time, but they did not find them very interesting, and soon went to bed.

The next morning Old Pluck called a meeting of his companions. "Boys," he said, "this

robber life is a good deal stupider than anything we left behind us. Let's get back to school as fast as we can, and enjoy what is left of the Christmas fun. We will all admit that we are sorry for what we have done, and will promise not to run away again; and Tomtit can go to the master and tell him so."

"I'll be the first one whipped," ruefully remarked Tomtit; "but if you boys say so, of course I'll do it."

The boys now took leave of the robbers, Tomtit having been first presented with the piece of blue taffeta to make him a jerkin. When they reached the school Tomtit told his tale, and he was the only one who was not punished.

The next year these eleven boys were leaving school for a vacation, and on their way home they thought they would stop and see their old friends, the robbers. Much to their surprise, they found everything changed at the castle. It was now a boys' school; the chief was the principal, and each of the other robbers was a teacher.

"You see," said the principal to Old Pluck, "we never knew how stupid and uninteresting a robber's life was until we were forced to lead it against our will. While you were here we

learned to like boys very much, and so we concluded to set up this school."

"Do you have Christmas trees, and carols, and games?"

"Oh, yes," answered the principal.

"So do we," said Old Pluck.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Tomtit, standing up very straight. "No more fire and tribute for us. We've grown out of that kind of nonsense."

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